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CHINESE TURKESTAN

WITH CARAVAN AND RIFLE

Swan Electric Engraving Co

An Asiatic Wapiti, 54".

CHINESE TURKESTAN

WITH CARAVAN AND RIFLE

BY

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PREFACE

Some three years ago my friend J. V. Phelps and I determined to make a journey into Central Asia to try and shoot the Altai wapiti, the great stag of the Tian Shan. We knew very little about him beyond the bare facts that he existed somewhere in those parts, and was said to be a very fine beast (which he is, though he has been somewhat magnified by distance); consequently we were filled with longing to shoot him, with results which will be seen later. I am not much of a geographer, but may here say that the Tian Shan is a great range of mountains which, running east and west, separates Chinese Turkestan from Russia in Asia. The part which I propose to describe is that east of Khan Tengri, where the boundary line is some distance to the north of the main range. I have only taken up the task of writing this book because it seems a pity to spend so much time and trouble in acquiring information without giving the benefit of it to other sportsmen who may thus be saved

the immense waste of the said time and trouble which ignorance of the country and of where to find the different sorts of game entailed upon us. When I speak of ignorance of the country I do not mean that Central Asia was unknown to us: we had both on former occasions been all over the Yarkand country and into the Pamirs, while I had also made a journey into Western Thibet. Thus we possessed the experience necessary to organise a caravan, and some of our men had been with us before; also we could both speak Hindostani fluently and Turki a little, so that our orders were given directly to the servants, and not passed on in a mutilated form by an interpreter.

The interpreter difficulty is one of the most fruitful sources of trouble in a caravan. A sportsman fresh from England and unfamiliar with the East is, from the nature of things, at the mercy of his interpreter, who in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred will have but a limited English vocabulary and a vast conceit. He will frequently misunderstand what is said to him, but his own high opinion of his linguistic talents will prevent his acknowledging this, and he will put his own interpretation on what he hears rather than confess his ignorance. The result of course in camp is generally worrying and at times disastrous.

We decided on our somewhat roundabout route partly to avoid the above difficulty and partly because we both wished to revisit Kashmir, a country which when once known has an extraordinary attraction for most people. There is, of course, a very much more simple and direct route from England than the one we took. This I propose to describe further on, and at the same time to give some hints as to which part of the country I consider best worth visiting from a shooting point of view, with notes as to distances, game to be found, best time of year, and anything else which I think may be of service.

Recently Central Asia has been a good deal written about, but chiefly from scientific or political points of view. These I have left alone, knowing but little of the former, and considering that the latter does not come into the province of what is merely a journal of travel and sport. It is perhaps rather a large order to give a description of the sport to be got in so big a district, but as the country is practically new to sportsmen I may be excused for my attempt. I have travelled and shot over a good deal of it myself, and have in addition collected much information from natives; this, of course, cannot always be implicitly relied upon, and when I mention any shooting-grounds which

I have not personally visited, I am careful to give the source from which my news was obtained and my own opinion of how far it is to be trusted.

With regard to names of places I have followed the local pronunciation, which accounts for such apparent discrepancies as *kudak*, a well, being sometimes spelt *kadak; kol*, a lake, *kul*, etc. (*a* = short *u; u* = *oo*.)

Many books of travel which I have read begin, so to speak, in the middle; for my part I think it a good plan to go somewhat fully into the details of equipment and making up a caravan. These should be found of use for any part of Central Asia, and will show that an expedition there from India is not such a formidable undertaking as it sounds. If I succeed in making things smoother for anyone else who may wish to try the country written of, I shall feel that my labour has not been in vain, and that it has served a better purpose than merely that of filling up the wearisome hours after the day's march.

The distances were got by timing the caravan, and are, I think, fairly accurate, enough so, at all events, for the guidance of other travellers.

Two passports are necessary — Russian and Chinese. It is no more trouble to have them as comprehensive as possible, and it may be useful as

plans are changeable things. For these reasons I would have the Russian one to cover Russia and Russia in Asia, the Chinese to cover Chinese Turkestan (the New Dominion) and China proper; if names of towns are required, they can easily be got from the map. These passports are to be got through the Foreign Office; the Chinese one may take some time to procure. When in Chinese territory the passport should always be sent up with a card on arriving in a town where there is an amban. I think that special leave is required for an English officer to travel on the trans-Caspian Railway, otherwise I believe that the ordinary passport is sufficient; but the regulations may be changed, and it would be as well to make inquiries before starting.

I am indebted to the kindness of Capt. H. H. P. Deasy and Mr. I. Morse for photos of the Yarkand country and Tekkes respectively.

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CHINESE TURKESTAN

WITH CARAVAN AND RIFLE

CHAPTER I.

OUTFIT, Etc.

It now becomes necessary to describe our own doings, and it is as well to begin at the beginning, by giving a fairly comprehensive list of what we took with us, commencing with the things which we thought it necessary, or preferable, to bring out from England. There are not many of these, the first and most important being arms and ammunition. We each took the battery described, and for the class of shooting I do not think it could be bettered. The question of rifles is a vexed one to enter upon, as every sportsman has his own ideas on the subject; but I propose to give mine an airing now that I have the opportunity. I may mention parenthetically that some of my remarks are obviously intended for beginners.

A ·303 or other Small-bore Rifle.—To my mind the chief advantage of these rifles is the absence of

smoke and recoil; the flat trajectory is of course another, but as one does not often want to fire very long shots it is only occasionally that their superiority in this respect to the ordinary express is of use. On the other hand, an ideal bullet has yet to be invented; they are all deficient in stopping power unless very well placed, in which case almost any bullet will do. The blood track of a wounded animal is usually very small, and this of course adds much to the difficulty of tracking. Nitro powders are apt to be affected by great cold, and in severe weather those cartridges intended for immediate use should be warmed a little before going out and should be carried in an inside pocket until actually required.

A ·450 *Express.*—For this I prefer a long bullet with a small hole to the usual copper-tubed one, as I think that it does more damage. For dangerous game, such as a tiger or bear, I would always use the express for choice, while even the wapiti is a sufficiently difficult animal to kill, and one does not get enough chances to afford to waste them.

A Shot and Ball Gun.—Always useful to fill the camp larder, while a few ball cartridges may be of use in case of an accident happening to one of the rifles.

A Revolver.—This is unlikely to be wanted at all, but if it is it will be wanted very badly, so should be a serviceable one and not a mere ornamental

popgun; it should have a leather holster to go on the saddle, as this saves all trouble in carrying it, and it is consequently more likely to be at hand in the unfortunate event of there being occasion to use it.

It is advisable to go to a good maker, as the better the weapons are the less liable they are to get out of order, and for the same reason complicated actions should be avoided.

The purchaser should go down to the shooting-range and have the rifles sighted to suit himself; gun-makers are very fond of sighting them for a half-bead, which is all very well for target practice, but for the real thing a great mistake. They should be sighted to take a full bead, as animals are not always so obliging as to give time for fancy shooting, while in a bad light or for a running shot a sportsman wants to see as much foresight as he can, and there is no need to increase the already sufficient risk of shooting too high; most wasted bullets go over the top and the half-bead idea greatly assists them to do so. At the same time, care should be taken to see that the foresights are sufficiently fine, as if it is necessary to fire a long shot, a sight which not only covers the whole animal but a considerable portion of the surrounding landscape as well is useless and the advantage of the small-bore rifle's extended range is practically thrown away. Some spare foresights should be taken. Two rifles of

some sort are absolutely necessary, as accidents will sometimes happen and amateur gun-repairing is not of much account. Both rifles and guns should be fitted with slings, which are a great convenience in a rough country. With regard to the amount of cartridges, since it is better to have a hundred too many than one too few, I think I should take five hundred small bore, one hundred express, and at least two hundred shot, and twenty-five ball for gun. I always take out at least fifteen to twenty rifle cartridges with me ; one often uses a lot trying to stop a wounded beast, and nothing is more annoying than to run short, while the knowledge that one is likely to do so is not at all conducive to good shooting.

Leather is the best material for gun-covers. Canvas wears out too quickly. Common leather covers for gun-cases are very useful, as they save a lot of wear and tear in travelling. Gun-cases are usually filled with reloading implements and bullet moulds, which are never used. It is always worth a sportsman's while to see his guns cleaned himself, and care should be taken to wipe all oil out of rifle-barrels before starting in the morning, otherwise the first shot is apt to go high. Leather cartridge-pouches to go on belt to hold ten cartridges, each in separate divisions, are very useful. Plenty of good oil is the last but not the least important item to mention.

Saddle and Bridle.—The saddle should be of

some colonial pattern, with breastplate and crupper, fitted with holsters and saddle-bags, also with straps to carry a rug or great-coat behind.

Miscellaneous.—A good supply of shooting-boots, as they wear out quickly ; a lot of spare nails for them, as they are always getting knocked out on stony ground. Personally I prefer screws to nails, as they are more easily put in, and hold better. Boot-trees. Hunting and skinning-knives ; for the latter purpose common butcher's knives are as good as any. An emery-stone in a leather sheaf ; without this protection it is sure to get broken, and probably will in spite of it.

A hunting-whip with a loaded handle and a very long and heavy lash ; the village dogs are always a nuisance and often savage.

A pair of binoculars and a big telescope ; the former to search ground with, the latter to see if the game, when discovered, is worth going after. For this purpose a very powerful glass is necessary, and saves a lot of hard work.

Two or three dozen common web headstalls ; the native article is always breaking.

A Norwegian kid-coat, big enough to wear over the ordinary one. Mackintosh and over-alls.

A few pairs of snow-goggles.

This finishes the list of things which we brought out with us ; the rest we got in India.

With regard to clothes Kashmir puttoo is both serviceable and cheap. We had to take a considerable variety of clothing with us on account of the extremes of heat and cold in Central Asia; but I do not propose to give a list of it, and will only say that fur-lined coats can be got in Srinagar, and that a fur rug is equal to many blankets. One respectable suit of tweeds is necessary for paying calls.

Tents are best got in India. We each of us had one double fly-tent about 8 feet by 8 feet, and one single tent about 6 feet in the straight, with the back semicircular. The small tents were lined with puttoo. The small tents are most useful for short excursions from the main camp, in heavy wind or cold weather, and, of course, take much less time to pack up in the morning. The equal saving of time in pitching them is not of so much importance. Servants' tents should be single, their number depending on the size of the caravan. All tents should be khaki-coloured, if only for the reason that this does not show the dirt like white, and so is neater.

Bags for packing tents in should be of good canvas, and very strongly made; the ones usually supplied wear out at once, and the tents suffer in consequence.

Tent-poles should all be jointed for convenience of carriage; the leather bucket plan is the best way of packing them—*i.e.* two leather buckets with eyelet

holes round the edges. Put the ends of the poles into the buckets, and then lace the buckets together; the poles will form a compact bundle, and cannot fall out.

Servants' saddles are best got from Cawnpore, the Kashmir ones being very bad, as the trees break.

Stores.—These are, of course, largely a matter of taste, but it is a mistake to take too many, as they are more trouble to carry than they are worth. Tea, cocoa, tobacco, Worcester sauce, jam, baking-powder, and Keating's insect-powder are the only things of which it is necessary to take enough to last right through, as flour, sugar, salt, onions, potatoes, etc., can be got at most of the towns, and candles at most of the larger places; but as it is a nuisance to run short of light, it is always advisable to have a reserve of these. Dried apricots can be got at most places, and are very useful. We also took with us a few tins of army rations and soup for emergencies, and some condensed milk and Brand's essence in case of sickness. A certain amount of whisky or brandy should always be taken; if very tired, a drink will often enable a weary man to eat when without it he would be inclined to go empty to bed.

Medicines.—There is no use encumbering one's self with a lot of drugs the use of which one does not understand. I have found this list quite sufficient:

pills (plenty, as one is always being asked for them), quinine, phenacetine, chlorodine, castor oil, sulphate of zinc, oil of cloves (for toothache), laudanum, ipecacuanha, mustard leaves, vaseline cream, a lancet and some lint, a dental forceps, which can be given to the sufferer to experiment upon himself with; for ponies' backs, plenty of iodoform, permanganate of potash, perchloride of mercury, and blue stone. Natives have a touching faith in the white man, and if one is weak enough to begin, there is no end to the giving of medicines, therefore don't begin.

Presents.—A few things should be taken to give to Chinese officials in return for the sheep, etc., which they often send one. Crystallised fruits and liqueurs are useful for this purpose, watches being now rather a drug in the market, as so many travellers have given them in the Yarkand country. For all the lesser lights money is at once the simplest and most acceptable present.

Stores, clothes, etc., are best packed in yákdáns. These are leather-covered boxes, two of which are slung across a pony with straps; they wear very well and are practically waterproof. Price in Srinagar, rupees fifteen to twenty per pair; they should all be numbered, and a list kept of what is in each.

As for table and chairs, those of the Paragon

pattern answer very well; the table is not so gimcracky as it looks, while the chairs are both comfortable and strong; the canvas part should be bound all round with leather or it is apt to tear; both tables and chairs should be packed in leather cases.

The common pattern of camp-bed used in Kashmir is hard to beat; it is quickly put together, strong, and easily repaired in case of accident. The length of the side poles is the only drawback, but patterns which get over this mostly have other disadvantages which outweigh it. Tables and chairs may seem to be luxuries, but no old traveller roughs it more than he can help, and though sitting on the floor is all very well for a few days when away from the main camp, it soon palls upon one.

A hole in the ground and a waterproof sheet make an excellent bath, or the sheet can be propped up with a ring of stones.

Lanterns for candles are of many kinds, and are all equally unsatisfactory except to make darkness visible. Globes are all right, but their life in camp is of short duration. As to table equipage it is only necessary to say that all plates and cups should be enamelled iron, and that hot-water plates are invaluable.

A good waterproof canvas valise for bedding completes the list; with the exception of this, and

table, chairs, and aluminium cooking-pots, we got nearly everything in Kashmir. These cooking-pots are light to carry, and as they never want tinning it is not so easy for the cook to poison one as it is with the native copper article which he probably prefers.

Mosquito curtains and some spare gauze to make veils with are absolute necessities, as during the summer months the mosquitoes in the low country are very bad indeed.

Travelling with a caravan is in reality a very simple business. Of course it is a good deal of trouble getting things together. Once off, however, it is easy enough, as things soon get into working order; but there are times when the monotony of the daily routine and the impossibility of averaging more than seventeen or eighteen miles a day become rather trying to the temper. Eighteen miles a day is very good going on a long journey; often, of course, much more has to be done owing to want of water, grass, etc.; but as after a few days this is sure to result in having to rest the ponies, it will not be found that one's speed is increased by occasional efforts of twenty-five or thirty miles. The afternoons after getting into camp are always unnaturally long; reading seems a simple way of killing time, but books are very heavy to carry, and so it is best to take pretty solid ones which will stand reading more than once.

It is difficult to give a line as to expenses, so much depends on the route taken as well as on the size of the caravan; but the joint expenses of two sportsmen travelling together for a year should certainly not exceed fifteen thousand rupees (£1,000), and would probably be a good deal less; this estimate includes buying ponies, etc., but not, of course, the journey from England or the cost of things brought out. It is better to err on the safe side and not risk running short.

Indian notes can be changed in Yarkand or Kashgar. I could not get sovereigns changed in Tashkent.

TABLE OF VALUES

£1 = 15 rupees.

Yarkand, Kashgar, and Aksu.

1 rupee = 7½ to 8 tongas.
50 pul = 1 tonga.
16 tongas = 1 seer.
1 pul does not exist, the only small coin being a copper one with a hole in it; it is worth 2 pul.

£1 = 9·35 roubles (about).
100 kopeks = 1 rouble.

Kuldja.

5 yermak = 1 tín.
20 tín = 1 mizcál.
5 mizcál = 1 tonga.
but 8 Kashgar tongas only make 1 Kuldja tonga; so 2 Kuldja tongas = 1 seer.
1 rouble = 1½ tongas.

Tísa, or Chinese notes for one seer each, are current only in Kuldja and consequently have a slightly depreciated value. Yambus, or ingots of silver worth about fifty seers each, are commonly used, pieces of them being cut off and weighed for

the smaller sums; there are also Chinese coins of various values.

There are also two seers, one heavier, and so worth more.

In Khotan two Yarkand tongas are spoken of as one.

CHAPTER II.

SRINAGAR TO LEH

This part of our route has been so often and so well described before that I give no detailed account of it here. It is 250 miles, and at the rate of a stage a day takes fifteen days. Baggage ponies may either be hired to go right through from Srinagar or be exchanged on the way; but if many are required the first lot should be engaged to go as far as Dras or Kargil, after which fresh ones can be got from day to day at most of the villages stopped at.

We took boats to Ganderbal, which is at the foot of the Sind Valley, and ten miles from Srinagar by road, and thence started marching on June 10th, 1899. As we knew that we could not get over the passes north of Leh till about the end of the first week in July, we were in no hurry, and spun the journey out to seventeen days by halting on the way. Many attempts have been made to paint in words the beauties of the Sind Valley, but it is difficult to do justice to the panorama of mountains, snow, glaciers, pine forests, and grassy slopes which

it presents, the only drawback to the enjoyment of which is the wet weather prevailing there.

The scenery of Ladak on the road to Leh, consisting of rugged, rocky mountains and deep gorges, has a charm peculiarly its own, and the beauty of the occasional villages, each on its patch of bright green, is enhanced by the barrenness of their surroundings.

On the way up we had, of course, no adventures worthy of note, but near Saspul I killed a snake, a description of which may be of interest to naturalists. Personally I was not aware that any snakes were to be found at such an elevation (over 10,000 ft.) in the middle of the Himalayas. Apparently it is not poisonous—at least, I could find no fangs; its length 38 or 40 inches, dust-coloured, with diamond-shaped grey motlings on the back; underneath front half silver and grey; tail part a dull salmon colour. It was a thin snake, with small, oval head and long, tapering tail.

Our head man (*caravanbashi*) had come down to meet us in Srinagar, as we knew that there were sure to be a lot of odds and ends wanted, which are more easily got there than in Leh. He had been with me on two previous journeys, and as we knew him to be really trustworthy, we had told him to let the people about Leh know that we were coming, and wanted to buy ponies. So when we arrived there there were lots all ready for us to see.

Ponies may either be hired to go as far as Yarkand or bought. I think it best to buy them, as one is then perfectly independent. If it was possible to hire to Yarkand, and then get a fresh lot to go on without any delay, it would be a great saving of time. This, however, cannot be done; it is easy enough to hire to Yarkand, but getting another lot there would take at least a week, and as this ought to be sufficient rest for one's own ponies, there is nothing gained by having hired ones.

The average price we paid for our ponies was 46 rupees, which is a little higher than it used to be. At this rate we bought thirty-three, all Ladakis, which for long journeys are better than Yarkandis. Though they are small they are very hardy, stand cold and elevation well, and at a pinch can get along with very little to eat. As against this they suffer much from heat, and so are not to be recommended for continued marching through the lower parts of Central Asia during the summer. They are unpleasant to ride, mostly having bad paces; but for transport they are, perhaps, the best all round, and are not so liable as Yarkandis to sore back, which is one of the greatest troubles the traveller has to contend with; and when buying ponies one should be careful to take none that have suffered much from this, as, however well it may seem to have healed, it is always apt to break out again. Certainly our ponies nearly all broke down before the

end of the journey, but the incessant hard marching accounts for this, and, take it all round, I doubt if Yarkandis would have stood it as well. It is very necessary to feed them up well before starting, as none of the animals are likely to be in very good condition when bought. The simplest way is to buy a field of lucerne, a lot of which is grown round Leh, and turn them out in it. A fortnight of this works wonders in their appearance, and the fatter they are to start with the better; it soon comes off.

Most of the men we took with us had been in our service before, and were willing to go anywhere; but a stranger would have to be careful in his choice, as there are some pretty complete scoundrels among the Argoons. These men are all of mixed blood—Yarkandi and Ladaki; they are Mahommedans, and many of them can speak three languages—Ladaki, Turki, and Hindostani. So, as we could both speak the last, we had no lack of interpreters. They usually make their livelihood in the service of traders between Leh and Yarkand, so are well accustomed to travel. The head man (*caravan-bashi*) is, of course, the most important, his pay being 25 rupees per month and 5 rupees per month for food; ordinary syces, 12 rupees and 5 rupees for food. The monthly food allowance is paid while travelling, and they find themselves. They require an advance of some months' pay before starting. In addition to their pay it is the custom to give

them a suit of clothes (10 rupees) and a pair of boots. Ammunition boots from Cawnpore are best and cheapest. Later on we gave them each a sheepskin coat, numnah and pabboos (a sort of boot) for the winter. These we got in Yarkand. It is always as well to have a written agreement with servants in case of there being any trouble with them, which is, however, unlikely.

The most difficult man to get for a journey of this sort is a decent cook; we were lucky enough to have one who had been with us before, a fair camp cook and able to make bread, which is most important. In theory it is all very well to talk light-heartedly of roughing it, hunter's appetites, and so forth; but in practice it does not work. Bad food usually means indigestion at least, which is a great aggravation of mountain-sickness, and in any case no one who has once tried a diet of plain mutton and chapatties for any length of time will be willing to doom himself to it for a period of months on end. We always gave the caravanbashi and cook ponies to ride; the syces, of course, walk.

One syce is required to every four or five ponies unless the line of march is over a great extent of uninhabited country, when the carriage of food becomes a serious question and the number of men has to be reduced; otherwise, the more men there are the less waste of time getting started in the morning.

The native pack-saddle, or mullah, is the best; it is clumsy to look at, but is the one the men are used to, and is easily repaired or altered so as not to press on a sore place. Spare horseshoes and a lot of rope should always be taken. A very good principle of the art of travelling is to let well alone—in other words, not to worry about trifles, wait till things go wrong and then make a real row; but don't nag, it is the one thing natives can't stand, and is sure to result in general unpleasantness. Native ideas as to the management of ponies differ from ours; but never mind, let them have their own way, then if anything goes wrong one has some ground for complaint; otherwise one is simply told that it is the result of one's own orders—an argument which is unanswerable except by profanity. Also, if one can only get at it, they generally have a reason for their eccentricities. One example of this will suffice: After a long march in Thibet I had camped at a place where there was as usual very little grass. I therefore suggested that the ponies should be let loose at once so as to make the most of what grazing there was; but no, this could not be done, it was not *dastur* (the custom), they must be tied up for two or three hours first. On asking the wherefore of this proceeding, which had often struck me as curious, I was told that if the ponies were let loose at once they would lie down for the night after taking the first edge off their hunger; but that if rested first they

would go on grazing all night, which was far better for them: on consideration this does not seem improbable. Another thing is that ponies should not be allowed to drink while on the march or soon after getting in, the reason given being that it makes their backs more apt to gall.

Sore back, as I have said before, is a great trouble, and while actually on the march it is impossible to do much for it; in fact, if the weather is very cold, any attempt at washing the sores seems to do more harm than good, and one can only hope they are not as painful as they look; when halting or in warm weather, a daily wash with a solution of permanganate of potash (or perchloride of mercury 1 in 1,000) is the best thing I know of, followed by iodoform when the wound has become healthy; bluestone is simple and often effective to dry up a running place, and poulticing will sometimes be found necessary. When halting for a few days something can be done, but when on the march, though with care it is possible to prevent their becoming very bad, a real cure cannot be effected, and the old proverb that necessity has no law comes into force.

CHAPTER III.

LEH TO YARKAND

Marches.			
1.	Leh to Khardong	27 miles	Khardong Pass, 17,400 feet.
2.	Kardong to Satti	9 ,,	
3.	Satti to Taghar	14 ,,	
4.	Taghar to Panamik	15 ,,	
5.	Panamik to Changlung	12 ,,	
6.	Changlung to Tutyalak	15 ,,	
7	Tutyalak to Mergistan	7 ,,	
8.	Mergistan to Brangza Saser	12 ,,	Saser Pass, 17,400 feet.
9.	Brangza Saser to Murgu	10 ,,	
10.	Murgu to Kizil Langar	18 ,,	[17,600 feet.
11.	Kizil Langar to camp	23 ,,	Dipsang Plain,
12.	Camp to Brangza	24 ,,	Karakoram Pass, 18,300 feet.
13.	Brangza to Aktagh	26 ,,	
14.	Aktagh to Kotaz-jilga	26 ,,	Suget Pass, 18,200 feet.
15.	Kotaz-jilga to Suget	10 ,,	
16.	Suget to Ulbek	10 ,,	
17.	Ulbek to Bostan	15 ,,	
18.	Bostan to Togiamanlak	17 ,,	
19.	Togiamanlak to camp	18 ,,	Kilyan Pass, 16,500 feet.
20.	Camp to camp	20 ,,	
21.	Camp to Kilyan	25 ,,	
22.	Kilyan to Hasnabogra	17 ,,	
23.	Hasnabogra to Borah	12 ,,	
24.	Borah to Kargalik	24 ,,	
25.	Kargalik to Yakchumba	16 ,,	
26.	Yakchumba to ferry	24 ,,	
27.	Ferry to Yarkand	9 ,,	
	Total	455 ,,	

THE SASER PASS FROM THE SOUTH

LEH

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A new road has now been made which goes direct from Panamik to Tutyalak, missing out Changlung.

In addition to our own caravan we hired twenty ponies to go with us to Yarkand; these we used to carry grain and as it was exhausted to relieve our own ponies of their loads, for in view of the long journey in front of us we wished to get them to Yarkand as fresh as possible.

On July 14th we sent off the caravan, only keeping things for one night, and the next day started ourselves, crossed the Khardong Pass in fine weather, and got into Khardong in the afternoon just as it began to rain; but as the tents were already pitched, this did not matter. The Pass is an easy one, though both sides of the ridge it crosses are pretty steep; there was snow only on the north side where there is a small glacier, but not much even there. Looking back from the top, one gets a very fine view of the Leh Valley and mountains beyond, but perhaps it is hardly worth the climb to see it. Next day we had rather a job crossing the Shyok River. The baggage and ourselves went over in a ferry-boat, but the ponies had to swim it, and the difficulty was to persuade them to do so; they turned back, down, and went any way but forward; however, after several false starts, they at last made up their minds that it had to be done and did it, though, as the water was high and

the stream very strong, they were swept a long way down before they landed. I fully expected that several of them would be drowned, as they seemed to be poor swimmers, but in the end only one was missing; months afterwards we heard that he also had been found all right, and we got him on our return to Leh.

The Nubra Valley, like the rest of Ladak, is a stony waste except where the villages are; round them there are patches of irrigation and willow and apricot trees; the soil is the most hopeless-looking stuff, and looks as though it could not possibly grow anything, but it manages to do so somehow as soon as the water is turned on to it. At Taghar we met the first of the Yarkand merchants on their way down; they told us the road was open all right, but they had no caravan with them as they were only bringing silver down to buy goods in Leh. Here also we were treated to a dreary performance which the natives call dancing; it is said to be symbolical, but no one seems to know exactly of what, and as they only walk slowly about it is not exciting to witness, but they enjoy it immensely, and will keep at it for hours. The music was provided by a band of tom-toms, horns, and flutes of sorts whose efforts to please would have been more successful had they been further off; however, we professed ourselves charmed, and finally sent them away happy, with a small present.

At Panamik we were delayed for a couple of days waiting for grain to be collected. We wanted forty maunds (one maund = 80 lbs.), and so we did not reach Changlung till July 21st. This hamlet consists of two or three houses, with a few willow-trees and a small patch of corn. There are one or two other villages farther up the Nubra Valley, but this is the last inhabited place on the Yarkand road till Shahdula is reached.

At that time the road from Changlung went over the Karawál Dawán, 5,000 feet of very steep hill, with a vile track up it. To avoid this a road was being made up the Talambuti Valley, but was not yet finished. Thus far we were accompanied by Captain Kennion, the British Joint Commissioner, who came up to see the road and to hasten the completion of this part of it. His predecessor, Captain (now Major) Trench, did a great deal for the road up to Leh, and it is now very different from what it was in 1893, when I first travelled over it.

About Tutyalak there are a lot of burhel (*Ovis nahura*); we saw some from our camp, but as they were a long way up the hill, and we could not make out any rams among them, we left them alone.

Mergistan is an elevated and chilly spot just at the foot of the glacier, and it blew very hard the night we camped there. The Saser (17,500 feet) is

a bad pass, being over an immense glacier which fills the valley from side to side. The ice is a good deal broken up in places, and the going bad, but we rode yaks over, and they being to the manner born, of course made short work of it. It blew and snowed, as is said to be its almost invariable custom here, and was unpleasantly cold after the heat of the Nubra Valley. In the morning we were both rather bad with mountain sickness, but got better soon after starting. The mystery to me about mountain sickness is that sometimes one gets it at 15,000 feet, while at another time 18,000 feet or more produces no ill effect. I have travelled on higher ground than this road without feeling it, but this time I was more or less seedy all the way to Shahdula. Men born and bred high up in the hills seem to suffer from it just as much as we do. There is no cure; but it is as well to keep well wrapped up and warm, and I have no doubt that the less meat one eats the better. Lying down makes it worse. It is unpleasant to be sick, but the headache is the worst part.

From Brangza there are two roads which meet near the Karakoram. One follows up the Shyok river, and is called the Yepsang route, but the water being rather high it was doubtful if we could get up this way, so we decided to go by the Dipsang way, on which there are no serious water troubles, though it is a day longer, and there are two baddish hills

to be surmounted in the valley between Murgu and Kizil Langar.

On the whole the road does not call for much description; most of the country is as barren as it can be, and gains an added desolation from the innumerable skeletons of animals which lie on or near the path. With the exception of one or two views the scenery is not particularly striking; no doubt the hills are very high above the sea, but then the whole country is so, too; consequently they do not look much.

Despite its great elevation (18,300 feet), and the fact that many baggage animals there succumb, the Karakoram cannot be called a difficult pass, the approaches to it on both sides being steep only for a little way from the summit, which was quite clear of snow. A little way down the north side is a monument to Dalgleish, who was murdered here. The cairn had been partly pulled down and a good deal of damage done. This we repaired as well as we could, but on our return next year it was down again, and the inscribed slab of marble had been broken, the work, no doubt, of Pathan merchants, who have a racial sympathy with the murderer.[1]

Early in the season there is fair grass, all things considered, at Murgu and Aktagh, and a little in

[1] The murderer, an Afghan, was tracked down in Central Asia by Captain (now Colonel) Hamilton Bower, and eventually committed suicide.

several other places; but by the end of August the caravans must have pretty well finished it. There are a few Thibetan antelope on the Dipsang, but more between Brangza and Aktagh—that is, of course, also early in the caravan season. Later on, when much disturbed, they go, probably to the top of the Karakash River.

On July 31st we reached Suget, which is just above Shahdula, and were glad to get down to a more reasonable elevation again (about 11,800 feet), as the weather up above had been very bad all the way, with a constant heavy wind and daily showers of snow and sleet.

About here there are a few scattered Kirghiz, and at Shahdula, which consists of a small mud fort, a Chinese Customs clerk, on whom we called the next day on our way to Ulbek. We showed him our passports, after a lengthy inspection of which he expressed himself very much pleased to see us, and immediately tried to sell us a *yambu* (ingot of silver), which he wanted changed into rupees. However, as our ideas on the subject of exchange differed considerably, there was no deal.

Owing to the cold weather the Karakash River was low and we had no difficulty in fording it, which was lucky, as it has to be crossed twice and often causes a delay of two or three days at this time of the year, even when camels are used; but this time there was no trouble; the bottom is

smooth and firm, though the water is more than girth deep.

During the night we camped at Ulbek eight of our ponies strayed, and though we found them again the next day, we had to walk most of the way, in consequence of which we nearly got eaten by a large and savage Kirghiz dog. We had three dogs with us, two retrievers and Gujad, a celebrated traveller from the Pamir and of a very independent turn of mind. He usually preferred to march alone, and here came rather to grief as the result. He was great at hunting strange dogs as long as they would run away: if they wouldn't, he used to turn his back on them and look scornfully over his shoulder. On this occasion the adversary so far disregarded the rules of the game as to seize him by the tail, and nearly bite it off, so that Gujad turned up looking very woebegone.

On the Tograsu River there are two practicable fords, and we got over by the lower one; but it is bad and deep at the best of times, and the way to the Kilyan Pass up the Bostan Valley is a very wet one, as the road is mostly in the bed of the stream. Luckily the weather was still dull and the water low, as the snow on the hills above was melting but little.

We crossed the Kilyan Pass (16,500 feet) in fine weather on August 4th; there was no snow on it except the glacier at the top. None the less, it is

the worst pass of the lot, the descent on the north side being particularly long and steep. There are a great many ram chikor (black game) about the top, and Phelps shot three of them, so that we got our substitute for grouse before the 12th. They must nest very early, as even now the old birds were hardly distinguishable from the young.

There are burhel (*Ovis nahura*) in the side nullahs on the north of the pass, but as a rule the main valley is too much disturbed for them, and we saw none, though I have seen them there on a previous occasion. The hills also hold ibex. From this it is a steady descent all the way to Kilyan, where we arrived on the 6th. The road crosses the river several times, and owing to heavy rain on the 5th the last few fords were just as deep as we could manage; at one in particular it was more exciting than pleasant to watch all our worldly goods in mid-stream, but with much struggling the ponies got safely through.

Hitherto we had only met a few wandering shepherds and some merchants on the road, but Kilyan is a town; it is on a plain at the beginning of the Yarkand plateau, and is not much of a place, though there is a bazaar of sorts. One advantage is that there are not many Chinese there, for their curiosity makes them a nuisance at any time, and only fear of the consequences prevents their being actually uncivil; on this occasion no more than two

NATIVES OF YARKAND

THE KARAKORAM PASS AND MONUMENT TO A. DALGLEISH

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turned up, and with unusual modesty gazed upon us from a respectful distance.

The weather had been cold and everything was backward, so the only fruit to be got was some rather unripe apricots, of which we ate as many as we dared. Camp was in an orchard, and it was pleasant to see trees again. Next day we crossed the Kilyan River for the last time by a very intricate ford, requiring a guide to show us the way, and began our march across the plateau on level ground again at last. Two marches took us to Borah, the last twelve miles being across a sandy desert. Borah is a pretty little place in a deep hollow, which one cannot see till almost into it, and appears to be a very fertile spot. Here we got melons and grapes, though neither of them were properly ripe yet, so it must be a warmer place than Kilyan.

The people here had a tame eagle, with which they informed us they intended to hawk gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*), locally called jeron, of which they said there were a few about—very few, I should think, though I believe there are some west of Kukiar, a small town at the foot of the hills to the west of Kilyan.

On August 9th we reached Kargalik—which is a considerable place, as the road from Khotan also comes in here—and camped in a very pleasant orchard, just outside the town; it is nearly always possible to do so in these parts, and is much

the best thing to do during the summer. Here the peaches were just ripe and very good. It is wonderful what a lot of ripe fruit can be eaten by men who have nothing else to do and really give their minds to it.

Speaking generally, the Yarkand country is practically rainless, or at least the rainfall is not sufficient for the purpose of cultivation. In consequence of this all vegetation is in strips along the streams, from which the water is diverted to irrigate the fields, and the size of the villages and towns depends entirely on the supply of water thus obtainable. At Yarkand, where there is plenty, a very elaborate system of water-channels has been evolved during the course of ages, and so a large tract of land has been made fertile; but most of the smaller streams are taxed to the utmost, and the small amount of water left in them is soon soaked up by the sand of the Takla Makán desert, which is in many places encroaching on the fields; as in consequence of the water being all used above, there is none to support the strips of jungle which should fence out the sand, and so the trees die and the desert supervenes. Between the streams the country is a sandy waste, with here and there a few straggling little bushes. As the road to Yarkand runs roughly north and south, while the streams there all run eastward, it will be seen that the road is mostly over a barren country with strips of cultivation at intervals.

Unpromising as the soil looks, it only needs water to become astonishingly fertile, the crops being most luxuriant; whilst owing to the hot climate in the summer, many kinds of fruit are grown in great perfection, among which the melons of Central Asia have been long and justly celebrated. During the winter the atmosphere is pretty clear, but in summer-time the sky is usually overcast, partly with clouds, but more with dust, raised from the desert by storms of wind (*buran*), which hangs in the air; the result is a general haziness, the distance being all obscured, and one would never imagine that there are great mountains so close at hand, as for months at a time they are quite invisible.

To return to Kargalik; the amban there (I use the word as meaning a Chinese official of standing, never having been able to make out their various grades) was so attentive as to be rather a nuisance. He sent us a present of sheep, fowls, etc., and repeated messages begging us to stay a day or two and have dinner with him, a frequent request from ambans about here, but we excused ourselves on the plea of haste. Chinese officials nearly always send presents and it is difficult to know what to give in return. On this occasion we sent a box of crystallised fruits; these and liqueurs seem to be most appreciated, being perhaps as good as anything.

In our Kargalik orchard there were only a few

mosquitoes, but at the next place, Yakchumba, though the natives informed us that they had only just begun to come out, there were already enough to be a nuisance.

We camped one night under a few trees just by the ferry over the Yarkand River, and while here a man from the neighbouring village brought us a lot of eggs for sale. I happened to see them, and as they looked rather ancient, proceeded to make a further examination before they were paid for; the first was rotten, the next and the next; they were all bad, and the fellow must have collected all the nest eggs in the district for our special benefit. We talked to this genius in a way which rather alarmed him, and then sent him off for more, with the assurance that if he brought any bad ones we would make him eat them himself. The next lot were fresh.

Next morning, August 12th, we crossed the river, ponies and all, in huge, flat-bottomed boats. In winter it is fordable a few miles higher up, and the direct road goes that way, but when the summer floods are on it is necessary to make a détour to the ferry, which has to be down here as the navigation above is much impeded by sandbanks.

Some distance outside the city of Yarkand we were met by a lot of Hindus who reside there, and thus escorted, we proceeded to the house we were to stay in—a very good one, with a pleasant

garden, and situated well away from the town. The few European travellers who have been here have nearly all stopped at the same place, and a bridge in the garden has several names and initials, most of them familiar, carved on its balustrades.

The aforesaid Hindus are nearly all money-lenders and appear to make rapid fortunes out of the guileless Yarkandis; they are indeed an enterprising lot, and in pursuit of their profitable calling some of them have even penetrated as far as Tashkent in Russian Turkestan, where I am told that a small crowd of them may usually be seen round the law-court, but there I should imagine that Russian bureaucracy takes a good deal of the gilt off their gingerbread. On the whole perhaps these money-lenders, whose numbers are rapidly increasing, are not an unmixed evil, credit being the life of trade, at least theoretically; and the Mahommedans, being by their religion forbidden to take interest for a loan, are not unnaturally averse to lending large sums, though among themselves they are very charitable in a small way.

The present amban of Yarkand is a cheerful old Chinaman who apparently rather prides himself upon his knowledge of European ways and absence of ceremony; anyway he came to call on us the morning after our arrival and took us quite

unawares, as he had sent no one in advance to say that he was coming, and we naturally expected that he would wait for us to call on him first; the result was somewhat embarrassing, as he walked straight into my bedroom, which was not tidied up to receive visitors, and so cut off my retreat. We were at breakfast in the veranda, coatless and, worse than all, hatless; but there was no escape; however, he did not seem to mind much, and after mutual apologies we commenced a long conversation, which was carried on through our respective interpreters. We spoke Hindostani to our man, who put it into Turki for the amban's man, he put it into Chinese and thus delivered the mutilated remains of our remarks to the amban himself. It is difficult to conduct conversation on these lines, and though we got on better than might have been expected, the answers we received were at times extremely irrelevant, to say the least of it. He was very anxious for us to dine with him, but we had both suffered Chinese dinners before, and so began with one accord to make excuses, and succeeded in escaping, though I fear somewhat ungracefully. Later on in the day we returned his call, when they fired off quite a number of guns in our honour.

Chinese etiquette with regard to calling is rather peculiar, and though, of course, I do not profess to know much about it, it is worth while for a

traveller to remember the following points: First, you send your card and a message to say that you are coming, about half an hour after which you go yourself; never take your hat off, and don't drink the ceremonial tea with which you are presented until you are ready to leave; if your host drinks his first, it is a hint that he has had enough of you, but we never stayed long enough for this; don't inquire into the health of Mrs. Chinaman, and don't be surprised at being asked your age, as this is a Chinese way of showing kindly interest. We got a lot of Chinese cards written for us in Yarkand, simply our names, or as near as they could get them, copied off the passports in Chinese characters on a strip of red paper; a large supply of these cards is necessary, as they should be sent on arrival, departure, and any other possible occasion as well. There is another form of card like a little book; if this is used, it is always returned, but as it soon shows signs of wear the others are the most convenient.

We stayed at Yarkand for a week to give the ponies a rest, and during this time amused ourselves buying such curios as were to be found. At first but few things were brought and exorbitant prices asked, but after a day or two things changed and the people became quite keen to deal; when we left a man actually came nearly two marches after us with a piece of old brass-work for sale.

Our purchases were chiefly cháguns, which are rather handsome brass jugs used for making tea in, some beautifully embroidered Chinese robes, a lot of large and highly ornamented buttons made of malachite and silver filigree, and some Chinese bowls and plates. Having packed them all up, we sent them down to Leh by a trader and found them there all right on our return next year. I wanted to buy a saddle pony, and as soon as this was known a lot were brought for me to see; finally I made a choice and bought the animal for eighty rupees, after an immense amount of bargaining, which was conducted through a middleman.

From Leh we had been accompanied by a merchant, one Syed Jolâl, whom we were supposed to protect from the possible assaults of another trader, Dilda Khan. They were both Pathans and had had a row of some sort, and Dilda Khan was supposed to have left Yarkand breathing forth threats and slaughter with the avowed intention of settling the feud should he meet with his enemy on the way. We passed Dilda Khan at Borah, but as we saw nothing of him our office of escort was a sinecure after all. Syed Jolâl was a huge man, about as big as the two of us rolled into one, and might almost have been supposed capable of taking care of himself; none the less, he was very grateful for having been allowed to travel under our wing, and sent us loads of fruit, sheep, etc.

as well as coming to see us himself and bringing his friends, some of whom I had met before; notable among them was Mahomet Jan, a well-known character, whose acquaintance I had made during a trip to the Pamir a few years before.

CHAPTER IV.

YARKAND TO MARALBASHI

Marches.		
1. Yarkand to Edjitko	20	miles.
2. Edjitko to Saljilak	12	,,
3. Saljilak to Lailak	12	,,
4. Lailak to Mehnet	16	,,
5. Mehnet to Alaghur	20	,,
6. Alaghur to Aksakmaral	15	,,
7. Aksakmaral to Shamal	20	,,
8. Shamal to Maralbashi	16	,,
Total	131	,,

MARALBASHI TO AKSU

Marches.		
1. Maralbashi to Charbak	16	miles.
2. Charbak to Tumshok	18	,,
3. Tumshok to Chadir Kul	14	,,
4. Chadir Kul to Yakka Kudak	12	,,
5. Yakka Kudak to Yaidu	14	,,
6. Yaidu to Chilan	12	,,
7. Chilan to Chol Kadak	18	,,
8. Chol Kadak to Siérat	18	,,
9. Siérat to Aksu Yangi Shahr (New City)	21	,,
Total	143	,,

On August 18th, 1899, we started again, getting off rather late in the morning, as is usual the first day, and so having to travel through the hottest part of it. The day's march was mostly through cultivation, but the road was inches deep in fine white dust, producing a thirst which melons only partly alleviated. Close to the serai we pitched camp in a field on which the lucerne had been cut, and there being no wind at all, as evening came on the air grew simply thick with mosquitoes; but luckily it turned chilly an hour or two after sundown, and they all disappeared. Till then their numbers and ferocity were most unpleasant. There had been a local fair-day at the village close by, and we saw lots of people on their way home—a cheerful crowd, so much so, indeed, that I was half inclined to think that some of them had sunk their religious principle of total abstinence for the occasion.

Next morning we made an earlier start, and so the caravan got to Saljilak before the worst of the heat. A bit of the way was over sand dunes, where the desert has got a footing. On the way I saw a dead snake with a thick body and flat, venomous-looking head; but it was rather too dead for close examination to be pleasant, and so I don't know whether it had poison-fangs or not.

We pitched camp under some willow-trees on a backwater joining the Yarkand River, and proceeded to unpack and put together a portable boat

which we had brought out. Great was the admiration and astonishment of the natives when the launch was accomplished and they saw that it would float.

For the next three marches the caravan went by land and we by water, a pleasant change from the heat and dust of the road, as there always was a breeze. The river is very wide and shallow in places, so that at times it was not easy to distinguish the main channel, and as the current was pretty strong, and the boat steered about as well as the proverbial dray, we several times nearly got wrecked on snags, of which there were more than enough, and occasionally ran aground on sand-banks; but these were minor drawbacks to which we soon got used.

The scenery is not interesting, as the country is nearly dead-flat; the banks are covered with reeds (*khamish*) and low jungle-bushes, with here and there a clump of bigger trees where there is a village. The villages are all some way back from the shore. The bed of the river is too big for the amount of water in it, and there are extensive mud-flats and sandbanks among which the stream pursues its devious way, twisting about in every direction, and sometimes trying, with more or less success, to run two ways at once. The result of this was, that it was impossible to say how long it would take to reach the village where we were to halt; for journeying by water doubles the distances, at least. On

the third day, after floating down for nine hours, we began to fear that we had missed Alaghur altogether, so we went ashore and walked up to a village to make inquiries. Now, my knowledge of Turki is not very great, and though I talked for some time, and the people seemed to listen, it was without the result I wanted. We were offered fire, milk, and bread, as they appeared to think that we were starving; but the information sought for was not forthcoming. After a bit, when the whole population of the village had gathered round, and I was beginning to despair of my task, it at last dawned upon one more intelligent than the rest that I was speaking (or trying to speak) a language which he could understand. When he had once arrived at that it was all right, and I found that so far from having passed Alaghur we had still four or five miles further to go. We saw very few geese or ducks, so I suppose that at this time of the year they are all out in the swamps.

Not being sure whether the main branch of the river went near Aksakmaral or not, we took to the road again, and reached Maralbashi on August 25th. The last march was rather a wet one, as an embankment had given way and let the water out all over the place; but the local amban had heard of our coming and had sent high-wheeled carts to assist us, so we managed all right. In the worst place we had to cross the water was quite clear, so it was

probably a branch of the Kashgar River, as the water of the Yarkand River is muddy. The water of the Kashgar River is quite clear at Maralbashi, and it must evidently pass through swamps where the mud has a chance to settle down.

From Alaghur to Shamal the road runs through jungle, chiefly a kind of poplar-tree, interspersed with open glades and swampy patches covered with high reeds. Here the Yarkand stag (*Cervus kashmeriensis yarkandensis*) and jeron (*Gazella subgutturosa*) are fairly abundant ; so at Aksakmaral I interviewed the local shikari on the subject. In my own experience, and I believe in that of the few other sportsmen who have tried it, the pursuit of this stag during the winter months is very little good. The ground is then covered with dead leaves, and in many places with a thin saline crust, so that it is impossible to walk quietly ; and although one sees plenty of tracks, and often hears the animals themselves bolt through the thickets, there is not much satisfaction to be got out of this. If one knew exactly where a beast was, it would probably be possible to creep up ; but to crawl about all day on the chance is not good enough. I had an idea that something might be done during the calling season, hence my inquiries. The shikari said that the stags begin to call about the end of the first week in October, that the call is rather a scream than a roar, and that they would be easy to shoot

then; in fact, he thought one ought to get a shot every day, which I consider to be far too high an estimate. The people here have matchlock guns only, and shoot but little, and then chiefly during the time when the stags' horns are soft, as these horns have a considerable value for the Chinese market; but the mosquitoes are so bad in the jungle that not many hunters go out.

A word here as to the said mosquitoes. They are simply awful. Late at night they give one some peace, but they start again before dawn, and curtains, veils, and gloves are necessities of existence. The shikari said that by October they were nearly all gone, which I rather doubt, and that one could then live in the jungle all right; but he confessed that he would not care to try it much before; Aksakmaral is a particularly bad place for them.

The tiger is not found quite so much to the west as this—at least, so far as the Yarkand River is concerned. Wolves exist, but are scarce. Wild pigs are abundant, but the swampy, khamish-covered country which they inhabit is against seeing much of them. Other game consists of geese, duck, a fair lot of pheasants in some places, and a few hares; but the geese and duck all migrate before Christmas, when the hard frost sets in. The winter hereabouts is not very severe; little or no snow falls, and though the thermometer goes well below

zero, the low temperature is not much felt, as there is hardly any wind in the jungle at that time of the year, and plenty of firewood.

At Maralbashi we camped in a garden outside the town, and in the evening sallied out to shoot geese, which were said to come to a stubble near. Of course, on this occasion they went elsewhere; at least, we only saw one small lot, out of which we got one. A small boy brought us two fish which he had caught with melon seeds in the river near; they weighed about seven pounds each, and were, I suppose, some sort of carp.

Being now on a good main road, we hired three carts to come as far as Aksu to relieve our ponies of their loads. Several of them had begun to get sore backs, which the hot weather was not good for, but which were probably partly caused by the change from barley to Indian corn, the latter being a very heating food. We managed to leave Maralbashi on August 25th, so were only there the one night, and had not to call upon or dine with the amban; the difficulty of course was to get the carts in so short a time.

All cultivation was soon left behind us, and we got into a scrub-covered plain, which gradually became more and more swampy till the village of Charbak was reached. Next day we pursued our way over much the same sort of country, except where a spur of hills runs down from the north, and the road for a

little way is close to them. Here at the foot of the hills is Mazar Tagh (hill of the saint's tomb), a very sacred place, and we went to see the hoof-prints made in the rock by the steed of Hazrat Ali. It must have been a remarkably fine horse, as the hoof-prints in the hillside are about sixty yards long, and another hill which was used as a manger is some miles off. Beyond this there are a lot of old houses, but I could not find out whether they were the remains of an ancient city or simply an example of the Chinese method of dealing with a country when engaged in putting down a revolt.

Shortly after leaving Tumshok we got into tree jungle, so there must be water somewhere near; nevertheless, Chadir Kul is supplied by a well the contents of which are distinctly brackish. Next day the road was still through jungle, passing several watercourses, which were, however, nearly dry, with the exception of one near Yakka Kudak; here a native volunteered the information that the jungle was full of pheasants and said that he would show us some if we would come with him. So, thinking that the young birds would be pretty well grown by now and that some of them would be a pleasant addition to our rather monotonous bill of fare, we got the guns out and told him to lead on. He started off as hard as he could walk straight through the jungle, and after about four miles we arrived in a very heated condition at our guide's gourd-patch! Of course we

saw no pheasants and didn't expect to, racing along like that, while the gourds were mostly bitter, and anyway are not satisfactory things to quench thirst with ; so we started back again, but we took it out of that native on the way by giving him both guns to carry, and then we made the pace so hot that when he got back I question whether he had had an enjoyable afternoon. We saw tracks both of deer and jeron here, and between this and the Aksu River should probably be good ground for them. In the evening two Chinese came up to our camp and proceeded to examine us and our tents for all the world as though we had been stuffed specimens in a museum. Of course they were promptly kicked out, but surely no other people in the world have such a calm, self-sufficient cheek. Of course they are the superior Chinese, while we are only "foreign devils" ; but even a foreign devil resents their impertinent curiosity.

Beyond this we soon left the jungle for a great swampy flat of tamarisk, in the middle of which is situated the delectable spot called Yaidu. It consists of three or four houses and swarms with mosquitoes ; and there are no trees, a want felt as the day was intensely hot, the sky being clear after thunder and rain during the night.

Still a dead level of barren country to Chilan and again to Chol Kadak, which latter place may almost be called a village, but the water at both is about as

salt as it can be to be drinkable at all. Away to the north we saw some hills, but the weather was so hazy that we could not be sure whether there was snow on them or not, so they may or may not have been the main range of the Tian Shan. Near Siérat we again entered a cultivated country, and the next day, after about nineteen miles, reached the Aksu River, which is split into several branches in a broad and gravelly bed; only the main channel is crossed by a ferry-boat, the side streams being fordable. Some two miles on we camped in an orchard, just short of Aksu Yangi Shahr, the new city where the Chinese live; the old Turki city, the Khona Shahr, is about four miles further on. The Chinese city is, as usual, fortified with a wall and ditch, and also, as usual, when it is possible, is placed just under some rising ground which completely commands it.

From here we got our first view of the Tian Shan, a snow-clad range dominated by the mighty peak of Khan Tengri, 24,000 feet high, a truly magnificent and imposing mass of mountain which seems to rise sheer from the plain.

CHAPTER V.

AKSU TO SHATTA, IN TEKKES

Marches.		
1. Aksu to Jom	24	miles.
2. Jom to Arbat	16	,,
3. Arbat to Kizil-bulak . . .	18	,,
4. Kizil-bulak to Tangotash . .	17	,,
5. Tangotash to Khailik . . .	10	,,
6. Khailik to Tangotash . . .	18	,,
7. Tangotash to Camp . . .	10	,,
8. Camp to Camp . . .	16	,,
9. Camp to Shatta . . .	10	,,
Total	139	,,

Being anxious to reach the Tekkes as soon as possible, we made no stay at Aksu, but started the next morning for Jom, leaving our head man to take our cards and presents to the amban, also, if possible, to hire ponies to carry grain for us, as there are no villages worthy of the name after leaving the main road at Jom and turning up towards the Muzart Pass. The road was partly through barren country and partly through cultivation, but still flat; and now that we were within measurable distance of the hills we became more

than ever weary of these eternal plains, and looked eagerly forward to a land of ups and downs again. At Jom we, as usual, camped in an orchard clear of the village, and much to our surprise a *beg* (a small official) arrived in the evening from Aksu, bringing the amban's cards and a present of tea, with a message to say that the amban was sorry not to have had the chance of entertaining us at dinner. This was true politeness, but we were not sorry at all, as, judging from the quality of the tea, the dinner was better avoided. As our head man did not arrive we had to stop here next day, when he turned up all right, having hired fifteen ponies, which carried a month's grain for us.

On September 6th we were off again, turning north from the main road and crossing a stony, scrubby plain to Arbat, a hamlet of two or three houses just at the entrance to the foot-hills. It is in a valley where there is a small river, which must at times be unfordable, as there were some old boats on the bank. The plain was said to swarm with jeron (*Gazella subgutturosa*), but we only saw three.

To our great surprise, the people said that there were big wild sheep of some sort close to us, so we went out to spy the country; but the sheep were invisible, though I saw tracks of jeron and pig in the valley and a leopard's pugs on the hill. We saw a lot of chikor, a sort of red-legged partridge,

and therefore we went back for our guns and afterwards shot some of them. If possible, the chikor here are even better runners than the Kashmir ones.

We forded the river next morning, and then the caravan went on by the ordinary road, while we made a détour in the hopes of seeing the sheep. Our guide said there were not many now, as they had been much shot by the native hunters; but still, he expected to see some. The country was low, scrubby hills, with a few stunted willow-trees in the nullahs, where the water must be near the surface, though one small puddle was all we saw on the top. We saw three sheep, two ewes, and a very small ram; also we found an old head, which roughly measured 50 inches in length and 18 inches round the base of the horn. It is difficult to say of what species these sheep are; the ground they are on is only just off the plain, and cannot be more than 6,000 feet above the sea, if so much, which is surely too low for *Ovis karelini*, while the country is very barren: the animals are much darker in colour than *Ovis poli*, though this, of course, may be their summer coat.

About eight miles short of Kizil-bulak we came to another plain, on the other side of which the village itself was visible just at the foot of the hills, this time the beginning of the main range. Far up above we could see green grass and a few scattered

pine trees, which managed to grow on the southern aspect; while the tops of the ridges were edged with them, showing that there were plenty where the lie of the land was to the north. We went shooting, or rather, looking for something to shoot, in the evening; for, in spite of glowing accounts of the abundance of small game, all we saw was one very wary hare. Next day, after coasting along the hills for two or three miles, we entered the Muzart River valley, across which the Chinese, with their usual mania for walls, have built a line of what they are pleased to call fortifications, with the main fort itself in the middle. It is very nice to look at, but as it would take a small army to garrison, and one could nearly throw stones into it from the hills at the sides, its practical use in case of the invasion which it is intended to stop would not be great. Here keys were produced, the gate was opened, and we passed through, the Chinaman in charge, of small rank, possibly a Customs clerk, not putting in an appearance. However, after we had gone he was either troubled in his conscience about us, or wanted to show off once we were out of the way, and so he proceeded to arrest our caravan. We had already reached the camping-ground when news of this was brought us by one of our men in an almost speechless state of excitement. When he had cooled off a bit he explained that the Chinaman, persuaded by direful threats of the consequences of

interfering with us, had let the caravan go again, but retained the head man as a hostage for the production of our passports. It was distinctly annoying, as he could have had the passports for the asking when we were there. We felt that we would like a little conversation with him, only it was rather a long way to go back for it. Finally, the caravan arrived, and as by then we were calmer, we concluded to send the passports by a native who had come up. Away he went, but before he got half-way he met our head man coming up. He said that upon consideration the commandant had become a little nervous and let him go, explaining that he never would have interfered, only he had once got into trouble for letting two Russians through from the north. His dull mind was apparently unable to see that, whereas the Russians were practically just entering Chinese territory, we must have travelled hundreds of miles in it, and must be well accredited to have been able to do so.

There were pine trees close above us, willows and poplars on the bank of the Muzart River, and good grazing—on the whole, a nice place. There was a fair serai, too, but we preferred our tents. On the way we shot chikor, partridges, and hares. The partridge is very much like the English one; its call is nearly the same, but it is rather smaller and darker, the horseshoe on the cock's breast being almost black. We also saw one solitary

snipe, but he escaped us. There were literally swarms of hares here and also at Khailik, the next day's halting-place, on the road to which we passed a very good serai. Khailik is by hypsometer 7,670 feet, so we were beginning to go up at last. There was very good grass on a small flat by the river, but not much in the way of trees, the willows and poplars being small and scrubby.

Hitherto the going had been very good; where it otherwise would have been bad there was a made road, an unexpected luxury; but the next march showed a falling off in this respect. As a rule, in Central Asia a road is merely a track, and as long as it is practicable for baggage animals no attempt is made to improve it; but in places where it is absolutely necessary to make a way they usually do it fairly well. We began the next day's march by crossing the river by a deep and very intricate ford, which a very little more water must make altogether impassable; further up, however, there is a boat for use in case of need. After this, for more than half the march, the path twists in and out among heaps of rocky débris fallen from the mountain-side. At about six miles the river divides, the road going up the eastern branch. Finally, there was another bad ford at Tangotash, 8,500 feet, which is only about half a mile from the glacier foot, from which a big stream comes, while another comes from the north-west, the two joining just below here. Here are a

small fort and a serai, both empty and rather dilapidated. No trees or grass, nothing but rocks, with a little boortza growing on them. We saw some ibex close to, but nothing big enough to tempt us, so we went after chikor and pigeons instead.

Next day we crossed the Muzart Pass, which is indeed an icy one, though not high—about 12,000 feet. Within half a mile we got on to the glacier, the first part of which is steep and much broken up; steps had been cut in the ice and so the animals managed it somehow, but it was a work of time and difficulty. Even after getting fairly on to the top of the glacier, crevasses are both numerous and deep, so that the way is far from straight; and it took eight hours to cover a distance which is perhaps five miles as the crow flies. In the middle a snowstorm came on, which we could well have dispensed with, though it was in perfect keeping with the surroundings; but luckily it did not last long. Here we left the main glacier, which comes from the north-east, and crossed a ridge of earth and rocks where there were some stone huts. After this the path was mostly over moraine from higher glaciers on both sides, and ended in a very steep descent, at the bottom of which we camped at 9,500 feet; the caravan took ten and a half hours to get there, showing that in a hill country the actual distance has but little to do with the length of the day's march.

Here we were at last in the Ili watershed, the promised land, to reach which we had travelled 1,200 miles from Srinagar. A herd of some forty ibex were feeding on a hill far above us, too far to go after at that hour of the day, so we only watched them through the telescope and hoped that they were the first of much game to be seen.

But the stag was the object which had drawn us so far, and to find out the best ground it was necessary to have local shikaris; so next day we left the ibex in peace and went down the valley, eventually pitching camp near some log huts where there used to be a Russian post during their occupation of the country, but which are now inhabited by a few Kalmak soldiers in the Chinese service.

The scenery was particularly fine, and a delightful change from the hot and sandy plains of the Yarkand side. Here were green slopes alternating with belts of pine forest, with the snow-clad peaks of the Tian Shan for a background. Many of the glaciers come quite low down, their masses of broken ice and snow forming a strange and beautiful contrast with the luxuriant growth of herbage at their sides. A blue sky over all and a stream of clear water at our feet completed the picture, one to which I am quite unable to do justice, it being even finer than the celebrated Sind Valley in Kashmir.

The Kalmaks here did not seem to know much

about sport, so the next day we went on down the valley, crossing from side to side by well-made bridges; the road was good, being made where necessary. At one place the valley contracted till it became a mere gorge, and here we had to climb a precipitous cliff by a zigzag path supported by poles. Luckily they were stronger than they looked, as the result of their breaking would have been an immediate and premature journey to the other "happy hunting-grounds." The hills gradually decreased in size, and we expected every corner to be the last, looking eagerly forward to the first view of the Tekkes Valley; but not till Shatta was reached did our speculations as to what it was like come to an end. Then at last it lay before us—a sea of grass-covered plain stretching away thirty or forty miles to the hills which form its northern boundary. Further down, as we afterwards found, the valley contracts in width and the plain becomes more and more undulating, till at last it is a constant succession of grassy ridges, many of which are both steep and high.

We had heard many and various descriptions of this country, and I had somehow got it into my head that it would be very much like the jungles on the Yarkand side; so this open prairie-like expanse of grass was a complete surprise to me. The Tekkes River was not visible, its course here being far out from the hills.

At Shatta there is a strong military post of Kalmaks, all mounted and armed with breech-loading rifles, which they know how to use. The commandant, a very cheerful and friendly little warrior, came to see us, accompanied by his staff and escort with the customary banners, and after our passports had been duly inspected we all settled down to drink tea and talk. The first thing he told us was that there was another white man somewhere down the valley, nationality and name unknown, but we thought we knew who it was, and it afterwards turned out that we were right. There were a few deer in the hills near Shatta, but not many. As our informant remarked, there were too many guns for game to be plentiful there, and he thought we had better go further down before turning into the hills. He also said that the stags ought to have begun calling by now, so there was no time to be lost.

We were still uncertain whether the stag was the wapiti or not, as the people here had no horns to show us; but, anyway, there was certainly a stag of some sort.

In the evening we went out and shot some partridges and chikor. An old fellow who accompanied us had never seen a shot-gun before, and probably thought that we killed them with bullets, as he was much impressed, and said that if we shot like that we would slay many stags. We also saw a curlew,

but, like all his tribe, he was very wide awake, and we did not get a shot at him.

Never before had we seen such an extent of meadow-land, the grass on it being higher than one's knee. The native flocks and herds make but little impression on it, and it should be a wonderful cattle country. Many parts of it are level enough to be cut with a machine, and any quantity of hay could be made for winter keep.

The only two available Kalmak shikaris were away with the other man, so we were really rather stranded; but all agreed that the best shooting-grounds were to the east, and said that we ought to reach them in two days. Native notions of distance are rather vague, but, anyway, we decided to go down the valley and trust to luck to get more news and to pick up shikaris *en route*.

We were pretty sure that the other sportsman was Isidor Morse, an American, whom we had both met before in Kashmir, as we knew that he was somewhere in this part of the world. If so, he must have been in the district some months, and ought to know all about it, so we sent off a letter by a Kalmak, with instructions to discover his whereabouts and deliver it as soon as possible.

Here it may be as well to say that the people inhabiting the Tekkes are of three races—Kalmaks, Kirghiz, and Kazaks, the latter not to be confused with the Russian Cossacks. Of these the

Kalmaks are the dominant race, and from them is formed what may be called the military police of the district. They are Buddhists, wear their hair in short pigtails like the Thibetans do, and they took great interest in us as having come from Ladak. Always cheery and willing to oblige, they have excellent manners, and never let their curiosity get the better of them, seeming intuitively to know when their visits have lasted long enough. Of course, they don't wash much ; but that is a detail, and, in spite of it, the more I saw of these people the better I liked them, which is more than I can say of the others. They have a language of their own, but many of them speak Turki, and some a little Russian as well.

The Kirghiz and Kazaks are both Sart races, and call themselves Mahommedans ; but their religion appears to be purely nominal. The Kazaks have a considerable amount of Mongolian blood among them, and their features often show distinct traces of it. Both are lazy, stupid, and not at all addicted to speaking the truth, except when they see a special reason for doing so. The Kalmaks, on the other hand, are almost invariably truthful, and, if ignorant of the subject under discussion, will say so, instead of drawing on their imagination.

All three always go mounted, rarely walking if they can help it ; but the Kalmaks can walk, if

necessary, and their foot-gear enables them to do so, whereas the others wear high-heeled riding-boots, which would cripple anyone in a mile, and are far from being brilliant pedestrians without them.

They are all nomads, living in felt-covered tents, and owning immense herds of horses, sheep, and goats; they use mares' milk largely, chiefly in a fermented state, and keep but few cattle, though what there are are fine beasts. Their tents are called *aüls*, a term used in other parts to denote a village of tents, but here applied to the single article as well. The Kalmak aüls differ slightly in construction from the others, and are said by their owners to be less liable to fall down in wet weather —a considerable advantage, as the rainfall is heavy. In summer they live on the plain, but in winter they retire to the valleys, where they say that much less snow falls, and so they are better able to pasture their flocks. This statement about the snow was a puzzle to us, as it does not seem likely that the snowfall is less on the hills than on the plain; either some of the ground is too steep for it to lie on, or the slopes which face south get too much sun for any depth of it to accumulate. Perhaps, however, the true reason is that the wind which in these regions nearly always accompanies heavy snowstorms piles up big drifts in places and sweeps many of the hillsides bare. Be this as it

may, the absence of snow in the valleys was one of the few things about which everyone told the same story, and it is certainly true. The valleys are never inhabited during summer, the grass there being left for winter keep.

The three races are never absolutely exclusive, but some of the valleys belong to Kalmaks, others to Kirghiz or Kazaks as the case may be. In a Kalmak village there are usually a few of the others, and *vice versâ*. There are no special districts, but, generally speaking, the further east the more Kalmaks. On the north side of the Tekkes Valley the population is said to consist entirely of them.

The Turki spoken in the district appears to be a dialect or patois of some sort, at any rate differing considerably from that spoken on the Yarkand side of the hills, as some of our men, who were perfectly conversant with the latter, had at first some difficulty in understanding the people here.

CHAPTER VI.

SPORT IN THE TEKKES: WAPITI

It rained heavily during the one night we stopped at Shatta, but cleared up a bit in the morning, so on September 14th we started for Agoyas, also known as Akjas, and arrived there after a march which turned out to be fully twenty-five miles. The path skirts the foot of the hills, the slopes of which are largely covered with pine forests, the going being good and the plain here nearly level. Many of the smaller streams from the hills either dry up on the plain or run underground, and so do not reach the main river, at least not visibly, though some of them reappear on the surface at intervals as springs. As usual, we halted for breakfast on the way, and while collecting firewood from a few trees near a stream, we found an old horn which set a much-vexed question at rest, as, though it was much broken, the size of the fourth tine, or rather the stump of it, proved conclusively that it had belonged to a wapiti. There were a fair lot of partridges and a few quail, the latter mostly single or in pairs, and they seemed to us bigger than the

Indian ones. When we flushed any by the road-side we dismounted and went after them, and in this way made quite a respectable bag without any special search for game, but a good wide-ranging setter would be simply invaluable here.

We were accompanied by an escort of four Kalmak soldiers, whom the commandant at Shatta insisted on sending with us, saying that the district was full of horse-thieves and other bad characters, who found refuge in the hills. This is so, most of them coming from the Russian side; they were unlikely to interfere much with us, as, apart from the strength of our caravan, the authorities were likely to take the matter up seriously if anything happened to us; so the theft of our ponies by night was all that was tried on us. But native traders are not so secure, and robbery and murder are not uncommon. A horse-thief is shot on sight if found. At Akjas, where there are a considerable number of aüls, the chief Kirghiz of the district, who lives here, placed two aüls at our disposal and presented us with sheep, in return for which we made him a suitable present on our departure next day.

Travelling as we were, being, according to the Chinese phrase, guests of the country, sheep are presented to one everywhere in the Tekkes, while one can always have the use of as many ponies and men to take care of them as one may happen to require. For all this no pay

at all is necessary, it is the custom of the country, and a Chinaman would never dream of giving anything in return; but we always did so, either in money or kind, and flatter ourselves that we became extremely popular in consequence. The news as to shikar was vague and unsatisfactory, but it appeared that Akjas itself was about shot out, and so the word was still onward. We were much exercised over the waste of time, as everyone agreed that the stags were calling, though some said the rut would last another thirty days, some twenty, some ten. If the latter were correct, it seemed probable that our long and weary journey would be to a great extent wasted as far as wapiti were concerned. It is difficult to say whether the people are wilfully untruthful or whether their inconsistencies proceed from a constitutional inability to tell the truth; but no two of them told the same story, nor could any one man succeed in telling the same story twice.

Next day we did another twenty miles and camped near some aüls, the inhabitants of which provided us with wood, as there was none within two miles. Soon after starting we had to ford the Akjas River, which was rather a job, as it is wide, deep, and rapid. I don't know how they cross it when the snow is melting in the spring, but suppose that then the old plan of waiting for a few cloudy days has to be adopted. The Chinese have at various

times built bridges here, but the natives found them so convenient for firewood that they never lasted long, and so when the Akjas people presented their last request for a new one to the authorities in Kuldja they were told that they might wade. On the way we passed a long row of grass-covered tumuli, but what they are I do not know. We saw a roe deer, which caused great excitement among our men, who apparently expected us to run after it with shot-guns, our rifles being still in their cases. But the event of the day was yet to come. After camp was pitched three large birds came flying up the valley and settled on an adjacent hill; out came the telescopes, and many and various were the opinions expressed as to what they were. The simplest plan seemed to shoot first and inquire afterwards; so we went, and after a careful stalk got two of them, which turned out to be greater bustards. One of them was only winged and made off, with me in full pursuit; when cornered it showed fight, making a most determined charge, and was finally knocked down with the barrel of the gun. Number three did not go far, but when followed up he rose out of range and continued his journey till lost to sight in the west. They were lovely birds, but most indifferent eating; we hung one for ten days and looked forward to a feast, special arrangements being made to roast it, but it proved a failure, being both tough and tasteless.

We asked the locals, who were not Kalmaks, if they were common, and were told that they were, which is the usual answer to inquiries about game; but we never saw any more, and in time the Turki phrase, *Tolâ bâ*—"There are many"—became a stock joke in camp; however, it is possible that they migrate early, and that those we got were the last of them. There were large flocks of pigeons here, blue-rocks, the most ubiquitous of birds, and we shot a lot of them for the pot.

Another march of twenty miles took us to Kukturuk. About seven miles from starting we crossed the Mintaka or Minta stream close to its junction with the Tekkes, and thence followed the latter river, from which our last camp had been distant some two or three miles. The river here is fringed with poplars and willows, which afford shelter to a few pheasants; but we had not much time to go looking for them, and only got one or two duck, which we found in a backwater.

At Kukturuk the Kazaks told us that there were two Kirghiz, celebrated hunters, camped a bit further up the stream, so they were sent for in hot haste, and arrived in the evening.

Things now began to look more promising. Stags? Oh, yes, plenty of them in the hills, two days' journey away. Would they come with us? Certainly, provided we left some of our men at their camp to protect their families and herds from

the possible depredations of their Kazak neighbours, with whom they appeared not to be on the best of terms, and in whose honesty they had but little confidence. There was no objection to this, so next morning we moved up to their aüls, which were about four miles off, at the entrance to the hills, and spent the rest of the day getting small tents ready, overlooking rifles, etc., and despatching a part of our caravan to Kuldja for supplies.

During the day a Kalmak arrived with a letter from Morse, who was at Jilgalong, some way further down the valley. He wanted us to go there too, saying there was plenty of room for three rifles, and that the stags had already been calling for ten days; but we decided not to alter our plans. The Kalmak had, of course, ridden post, but it might, as far as we could gather, take us anything from three to five days to get there, and we did not want to waste more time travelling during the best of the season.

Our Kirghiz friends were not at all overjoyed to see the Kalmak, and one of them announced that if he had not come on our business he would have shot him on sight to avenge his brother, whom the Kalmak had shot two years before, probably only a bit of bounce, as the Kalmak paid no sort of attention to him.

Some Kirghiz while making charcoal managed to set the grass and bushes on fire, a not uncommon

occurrence. There ensued a scene of wild excitement; shouts and screams were heard, and, as if by magic, the whole population came galloping up, and set to work to beat out the flames, which with some difficulty they succeeded in doing. These fires often destroy large tracts of grass, extending to miles, which in the autumn is as dry as tinder, and burns accordingly. Sometimes the forest also catches fire, and burns for days at a time—a fine spectacle at night when sufficiently far off for camp to be safe.

On the 18th we started, ascending a ridge into the lower hills; then, turning westwards, we pitched camp in a sheltered place among the pine forests, and went off in different directions, as there was just a chance of there being deer here; but neither of us saw or heard anything.

I was not at all taken with my Kirghiz, whose method of procedure was to ride boldly on to a skyline, and thence examine the ground below. The valleys here were covered with pine forests, except when the aspect was to the south. Such places and the dividing ridges were covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, already beginning to die down, owing to the early autumnal frosts.

My shikari's chief desire seemed to be to impress me with his noble horsemanship, which he didn't manage to do, though before long I began to wish that he would break his neck, and have done with

it. Certainly, the ground which an unshod native pony can get over is both wonderful and alarming. However, one soon gets used to it, and thereby is spared a tremendous amount of hard walking, which one gets quite enough of without going out of the way for it.

It had been blowing hard all day, and came on to snow before I got back to camp, which was cold and uncomfortable enough; but a roaring fire of pine logs was soon set going, and we were too glad at being on wapiti ground at last to grumble at trifles.

When we started next morning the ground was covered with snow, but the day was fine, and in the open it was nearly all gone by noon. We were still heading west, sending the camp one way and going another ourselves. There were quantities of black game about, scratching in the snow and flying to the tops of the pine trees when disturbed; but we had only rifles with us, the guns having been sent with the camp, and, besides, we were in search of nobler game.

At last, after slithering down a very steep hill, we arrived at a place which was said to be really good ground; and when the camp came up, pitched our tents in a deep and narrow valley. While waiting we were much disgusted to see a pony wandering on the hill, as we feared there might be natives camped near, but it turned out to be a stray which

had probably been stolen and then lost by the thieves on their retreat through the hills. Our Kirghiz managed to catch it, saying that it would furnish them with many a good meal, and so I suppose we became accessories after the fact in a horse-stealing case; it was a young beast and, for a wonder, unbranded.

All the people here eat horse-flesh, so a stolen herd represents food, transport, and eventually profit if they can be got over the frontier and sold. This traffic ought easily to be stopped, as nearly all the beasts have well-known brands on them; but they are sold quite openly on the Russian side.

In the afternoon of course we went out, full of hope and cheered by the shikaris' assurances that this place was a certainty. Having got out of our camp-valley and gone some distance along a ridge, I took up a commanding position among some rocks and sat down to watch the surrounding country and enjoy the afternoon sun. Beneath me was a deep valley, some three or four miles in length, the foot of which joined the main valley of the Mintaka; one side was grass, the other pine forest. In this latter the deer were supposed to be, and the plan was to wait until they either called or came out into the open and then see what could be done. With me were my Kirghiz shikari and one of our own men—the latter, a keen but ignorant sportsman, brought to interpret and to

WAPITI GROUND

A KAZAK

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stay with the ponies in case we left them to try a stalk.

Sure enough the deer were there, for presently we heard a stag call, a long way off and below; it was some time before it was repeated, but as evening came on others took it up, till there were four or five stags calling at intervals in the same valley.

The call is not a roar at all, but a scream, and is difficult to describe; it is something between a bugle and a horse's whinny with the shake left out, and under favourable conditions of wind and ground can be heard a long way off. It can be imitated with a hollow plant stalk of about half an inch in diameter, but it is not easy to do it well. My shikari's successful efforts were about one call in three; so that though he occasionally got an answer, on the whole he did more harm than good, as when his first effort happened to be successful he invariably spoilt it all by producing a ghastly failure at the second attempt; but on this occasion he did not disclose the musical talent that was in him.

Well, it seemed good enough to have a try; we had to go some way round to get down into the valley; but as we rode most of it, this did not take long. My idea was to take the Kirghiz with me, try to locate a calling stag, and then either track him or follow the sound on the chance of getting a shot.

The Kirghiz now began to come out—he couldn't walk, never did walk, it was much trouble, he would get tired, etc.; but after being loaded with contumely and curses he concluded to come, so we started down the hill.

On the road down we came upon a roe deer, a very good buck, but not what we wanted, and we had to make a considerable détour to avoid disturbing it. This could not be helped, as it never would have done to drive it down the hill in front of us, but the time lost was of importance, as it was now getting late.

The stags kept on calling, but in a perfunctory manner, which in the light of after-experience seems to be their usual habit, each beast calling perhaps once in half an hour or so if well on the job. As the ground is very broken, and he generally moves between times, it will be easily understood that it is very difficult to locate a stag in heavy forest, and they very rarely come out during daylight. To make a long story short, I saw one stag on the way down as we crept along, keeping just inside the wood, but he was quite a little fellow; on the way back again I saw another just outside the cover, but he was between two and three hundred yards off, and it was by then so dark that it was as much as I could do to make out that it was a stag at all, so I did not shoot. Afterwards of course the Kirghiz swore that it was a very big one, that if he

had had his gun he would have shot it, that he used a silver foresight on purpose for night shooting, etc. In answer to these statements, being at liberty to believe as little of them as I chose, I said very little and believed not at all. It was a long and severe pull uphill to where we had left the ponies, and when about half-way the Kirghiz suggested that I should go and fetch his pony for him while he rested. My vocabulary was unequal to the occasion, and I was strongly tempted to make up for its deficiency with a stick; finally when we did get there he said he was beat, and announced his intention of sleeping where he was. As camp was only forty minutes' ride away I did not see the force of this, so got on my horse and left him there, whereupon he presently followed. When camp was reached I was careful to have it explained to him that if anyone was going to go and fetch ponies he would have to go and fetch mine. This man had a most exaggerated idea of his own importance, and we presently christened him the Duke of Kukturuk. As time went on he became more humble, but none the less I soon became sick of His Grace, and he never gave me cause to reconsider my first impressions of his ability as a shikari.

Next morning I heard a stag or two, but they were not enough on the call to do anything, and the shikari spoilt what chance there was by his utter

disregard of the wind; I did not know where he was going in time to stop him. In the evening I only heard one stag call and he only did it once.

The nights here were pretty cold, the thermometer going down to 14° Fahr., and we began to think that we were in for a very early winter; but this was not so, as though the weather continued to be unsettled, there were intervals when it was fine and warm.

The first afternoon Phelps had seen a good stag with the telescope, but too far away to get to, and had heard several others; but as to-day he had heard nothing worth mentioning, we held a council of war in the evening. Be it remembered that we did not know how much longer the rut would last, and that the shikaris were even more ignorant on this than on most subjects; however, they said there was another good place west of the Mintaka Valley, *i.e.* in the Akjas direction, between which and where we were the deer frequently went to, choosing whichever of the two places they were least disturbed in. We decided to move, though as there was no direct way it entailed a long round, and next morning we went down to the plain, camping by the Mintaka River just where it leaves the hills; here there were a few aüls inhabited by Kazaks. Another day saw us up in the hills again in the new place; both these marches were short, but just too long for the two to be done in one day.

In the evening Phelps heard several stags, and followed one a long way, but without result. My man conducted me to what he said was an excellent valley; but when we arrived there, we found that the forest had all been burnt at least one year before, so for all practical purposes I might as well have stayed in camp ; all we saw was a fox, at the sight of which His Grace became greatly excited, and wanted me to shoot it, saying that it was a good omen. I was willing to propitiate the Fates, but the fox had other views, and gave me no chance.

Next day I tried another valley, which promised better, as I not only heard several stags call—too intermittently, however, to follow—but also saw one stag out in the open with three hinds, and in a most favourable place for a stalk ; but he was only a small nine-pointer, so I left him alone, in spite of my shikari's loudly-expressed desire for blood. He said he would surely have shot the stag, and one or two of the hinds as well, if he had been on his own hook.

In the evening I heard them again, and for a long way followed one stag, which, from his deep-toned voice, we judged to be big ; but finally he ceased to call, and so I was done again.

On September 24th I only heard a stag call a long way off, so they were apparently all gone. The wind had been perfectly right the day before, and I was sure I had not disturbed them, so could

not make it out at all; but I found out the explanation afterwards. The Duke of Kukturuk had been complaining much of the hard work, saying that he was losing all his fat, which was very bad business, and expressing a desire to see his wife and family once more. I had told him he might go if he would provide a substitute, and this evening a poor relation turned up, who was also supposed to be a mighty hunter, so His Grace was free to depart, to our mutual relief.

The substitute turned out a better fellow, being both able and willing to walk; but he had a somewhat irritating habit of appealing to me as to which way we should go. Now, the wapiti ground here is very broken. Perhaps the easiest way of giving an idea of it is to say that it is a plateau intersected by valleys so numerous that of the plateau only the dividing ridges remain, and they are all much the same height. The valleys are very deep, very heavily timbered, and their sides often precipitous, so that it sometimes takes hours to reach a place which is only a mile or so away as the crow flies; consequently, an intimate knowledge of the country is absolutely necessary, and this I could hardly be expected to possess.

On the 25th we moved camp on a bit, as there seemed to be nothing much where we were; but in the afternoon, and at dusk, just as I was thinking of returning to camp, filled with blank despair, a good

stag with five hinds came out on to a ridge about half a mile off. One look with the glass was enough—ten points and heavy horns; there was no light to waste, so we ran most of the way, and tumbled over sundry fallen pines as we went; but when we arrived at the spot there was no stag to be seen, though the hinds were feeding unconcernedly about on the open grass which covered the crest of the ridge, both sides of it being covered with forest. At last a stag came out, but he was noticeably smaller than the one first seen; there must have been two of them. However, the light was now failing fast, and half a loaf being better than no bread, I concluded to try a shot, did so, and missed him. He galloped off, keeping in the open for some way, and I fired two more shots at him with the same result. Now, though the light was bad, it was not a long shot, and a stag wapiti being a pretty considerable sized target, I had still a faint hope that I had hit him, and might get him next day. This hope lasted till I arrived at camp, which I did in no very enviable frame of mind, and noticed when overhauling the rifle that some idiot had been fiddling with the Lyman sight, and had screwed it up to 400 yards. Then hope fled. Of course, it was my own fault, as I ought to have looked at it before firing, but it was none the less annoying for all that.

Next morning Phelps went off to stop a night at

a place which was rather too far away to reach conveniently otherwise, and I spent the early part of the morning looking for a blood track, in the existence of which I did not believe. While so engaged I heard a stag call in the heavy forest below, so started after him at once. He kept on calling pretty frequently ; but as he was always on the move it was some time before I got anywhere near him. The country was a steep hillside covered with a primeval forest of pines, and no one who has not tried it can imagine how difficult it is to get over such ground without making a noise. The whole place is covered with dead branches and twigs of all sizes, while every here and there fallen trees form a barrier which necessitates a détour of a length proportionate to the size of the obstacle, as dead pines make a chevaux-de-frise through which it is often impossible to get at all, let alone quietly. The sportsman who has done any tracking must have been struck by the extraordinary power which even the largest animals have of getting silently through thick cover, a feat difficult of accomplishment by man—anyway, civilised man, who wears clothes which seem specially constructed to catch on twigs or thorns, boots to make his footsteps audible, and is, in addition, encumbered by a rifle.

However, I gradually gained on the stag, getting at last quite close up, and momentarily expecting to see him ; but the forest was very thick, and I

thought it better to follow at a respectful distance, and trust to there being more open ground in front, than to spoil the whole thing by rashly hurrying on. What wind there was was luckily in the right direction, and quite steady. Patience was rewarded, for when I finally arrived at a small hollow the stag called in the bottom of it quite close by. I immediately obliterated myself behind a tree trunk and awaited developments. My side of the hollow was covered with pine trees, the bottom was full of high, thick bushes; the other side was littered with a confused mass of dead timber lying in all directions, a secondary growth of bushes between it, and one narrow strip of still living pines running up the slope opposite me. To my intense disgust the stag began to go up this strip; of course, he was quite invisible, and I feared he would cross the next ridge without showing. I couldn't help it if he did, so I crept a little way down my side till I could get a fair view, and sat tight. Up he went, calling all the time, till he reached the top, and then his evil genius prompted him to come out and look back. He was about 120 yards off, and standing three-quarters face to me. The shot hit him between neck and shoulder, and he came staggering down and along the hill; but I was not going to run any risks, so gave him the other barrel behind the shoulder. This was a finisher; down he came, rolling and sliding like a small avalanche, till he finally pitched

up against a fallen tree. My Kirghiz now arrived on the scene of action, and we scrambled over and under the fallen timber as fast as we could. The stag was stone dead when we reached him; but, nevertheless, the Kirghiz hastily produced his knife, and, making a small cut in the neck, pronounced the animal duly *hallál* (lawful), according to Mahommedan law, his conscience being, it seemed, easily satisfied in this respect. The head was nothing very great, only a fair ten-pointer; but it was a wapiti, and my first. Phelps came back in the afternoon, having followed up and shot a very fine twelve-pointer the evening before, so we were more cheerful, and we chatted over the day's doings by the camp fire till snow began to fall and drove us to our tents.

Next day Phelps went away again, and I went out rather late, but heard a stag, and went down into a deep and bushy valley after him. He stopped calling, and the Kirghiz went round to try and drive him; but this was a failure, though the Kirghiz saw the stag, which he said was small, so we had to climb all the way up again for our pains. During the afternoon we heard another stag calling in a very large valley, which, steep though its sides were, was simply one enormous forest of pines. We followed this stag till dark, up and down hill, but he was travelling too fast for us, and we never got near; but by the tracks there must have been

twelve or fifteen hinds with him. We were now a long way from camp, and on the way back the Kirghiz lost himself. I was pretty sure he was going wrong, but he wouldn't have it, and so let us in for a long round with a steep hill in it. By the time that his mistake became obvious, even to him, one way was as short as the other; but by then we had walked at least six unnecessary miles. In the bottom of the valley there were a lot of wild-currant bushes, and the bears had been busy with them, but, of course, did not show themselves.

The ground here now seemed exhausted, as in all the country travelled over during the afternoon we had only heard the one stag, and he was gone. The shikari professed complete ignorance of the ground further west, saying that it belonged to the Akjas people, and that he had never been there. Under the circumstances, a return to the first place seemed the best chance, so we went down to Mintaka, Phelps joining *en route*, and noon the day after saw us again camped where we had first heard stags.

In the evening I saw two stags and three hinds out in the open. One of the stags was a good one, but, alas! they were the wrong side of the Mintaka Valley, and there was no chance of getting there before dark. We were always away before dawn; but next morning I started even earlier than usual, and crossed the gorge to where I had seen the stag

the night before; but to-day he neither called nor came out, so there was nothing to be done. I stayed there till dark, and then started disconsolately on the long tramp back to the ponies which we had left far up on the camp side of the valley. On the way a stag came to the edge of the cover and grunted at us. Probably he only heard us moving in the bushes, and thought that we were hinds; he was quite close at one time, but it was by then far too dark to see anything.

Then came another day of unavailing toil. I heard a stag call once in the morning, and that was all. Phelps had heard nothing the last two days, and we both were agreed that it was the most heart-breaking form of shikar and the most horrible country to try it in that we had yet come across, which somewhat sweeping condemnation I afterwards had reason to recant, though I think it true enough of this particular place, especially if accompanied by Kirghiz shikaris. The Kirghiz method of shikar is to go out eight or ten men together, and if they see a beast they try to surround him, with the result that one or other of them usually gets a shot. From what I saw of them they are nearly useless as shikaris.

By now we were altogether weary of it, and as the rut seemed to be over, we gave up, and went down to Mintaka on October 4th.

Three of our ponies, out of a lot bringing up

supplies, had been stolen near Mintaka. This was not to be endured, so we had the head men assembled there and required redress, threatening to report the whole business to the Chinese authorities in Kuldja. Now, as the head men are responsible for the good behaviour of their respective tribes, this threat had a great effect, the more so because Chinese justice is apt to be rather indiscriminate, and a theft from travellers like ourselves would be sure to be severely punished. Of course, we did not really want to report the matter at all, but at the same time were not willing to let it pass unnoticed, which would probably encourage a repetition of the performance. So we agreed to take six ponies in place of our three lost ones, and say no more about it. As local custom entitled us to demand six ponies for each of ours, this arrangement was very satisfactory for the natives. As for ourselves, we wanted no more animals, so could afford to be magnanimous. What became of the lost ones we never found out; probably they were taken into the forest and there killed and eaten. A tough dinner they must have made, too, after marching all the way from Ladak.

Next day, October 5th, we returned to our main camp at the entrance of the Kukturuk Valley. I was naturally much disgusted at not having got a really good head, but there was no help for it, and the only chance left seemed to be to have another

try during the winter, provided that the weather would allow of it; which it wouldn't have as it turned out, for it proved an exceptionally severe season. However, I was not yet done with the wapiti, and got a very good stag a little later on, as will be seen in due course.

CHAPTER VII.

SPORT IN THE TEKKES: IBEX

We stayed at Kukturuk for some days, which we spent in the pursuit of roe deer (the Siberian roe), but without much success. They inhabit the lower foot-hills, and were not at all hard to find, as the higher growth of herbage, hemlock, etc., was now getting thin, and their large white rump-patch makes roe deer easy to see; but bucks were very scarce, though there were does in plenty. Phelps got one fair buck, but I never saw one at all with horns worth mentioning, though I used to see fifteen or twenty roe every day. There were a lot of wolves about, and we used to hear them howling in the woods on our way home at night. It seemed to me a little risky to leave the ponies tied up by themselves in the jungle while we were looking for game, but the natives said there was no danger so early in the autumn, the wolves not yet being driven by cold and hunger. I filled in some of my odd time endeavouring to fulfil a rash promise made before leaving England to collect rats; of this small game there was any quantity about, but apparently only three

different sorts, specimens of which were soon caught and stuffed after a fashion—a messy and rather difficult job for my unaccustomed fingers, and one from which I was glad to be relieved by an early fall of snow, after which the rats remained underground.

On the 11th Morse came up from Jilgalong; he had been in the country for some months, and had had good sport, getting several stags in Jilgalong during the past month and a lot of very fine ibex in Akjas during the spring and early summer. His shikaris were Kalmaks, and he swore by them, saying that he knew nothing about the others, but that Kalmaks were good enough for him. We decided to get Kalmak shikaris and go to Akjas for some ibex-shooting before the weather got too cold for the high ground. Morse said that he wanted no more ibex, but that he would come too for company's sake, as he was getting rather tired of his own. So on the 15th we made a start, going a cross route through the hills, which finally took us over a pass and so down into the middle of Akjas Valley.

The first evening out from Kukturuk the other two amused themselves shooting black game, while I went off on the odd chance of seeing a stag. I did, to my great surprise, see one with two hinds, but as he was both small and a very long way off I left him in peace. It began to snow heavily before camp was reached and continued to do so all night,

which nearly sent us round by the lower road, as it seemed possible the upper way might be closed, but as it cleared up again in the morning we decided to risk it.

The next two days were uneventful. We journeyed on by short marches over a very up and down country, seeing some ibex on the way. I shot one the first evening with horns 40 inches long. Anywhere else this would have been accounted a good head; here, however, I was assured it was quite small, but being rather sceptical, I concluded to keep it, just in case Akjas fell short of its reputation, which it didn't. The third day we crossed the pass into the Akjas watershed, and soon after beginning the descent saw some sheep, of which we had been told there were still a few left.

We all three started off to do the stalk. Morse had the first shot, and the final result was that we got two of them, losing another wounded one, which I followed till dark by a slight blood-track, but never could come up with, my day ending with a long tramp down to the tents, which were near a scattered clump of high-up pine trees; the road was none of the best, and the camp fire a welcome sight when at last it came into view. The best of the two heads was forty-five inches in length, and I think these sheep are undoubtedly *O. karelini*, as though they were a little dark in colour, this might be their summer coat.

Next day we got down into the main Akjas Valley, not following the side ravine down all the way, but turning across the corner over a spur. I was a bit behind the others, and was sitting on the hillside perhaps 1,000 feet or so up, waiting for the baggage-ponies, when I spotted some ibex on a grassy slope far above me; there were twelve or fifteen of them, only two being bucks, but one of these I made out with the telescope to be a really big fellow and decided to have a try for him. First, however, I waited for the caravan to come along, as I thought the sight of it might drive them away altogether; but they were a long way off, and when the ponies passed only went a bit further up the hill. For the time being they were in an unstalkable place, so more waiting was the order of the day, while the weather was not all that could be desired, as a little snow began to fall and the wind became more and more squally and shifty. When the ibex at last made a move they went further up the hill, but finally crossed a ridge and disappeared, leaving the coast clear for an advance.

The wind was by now very bad, but the valley into which the ibex had gone was apparently deep, and there was just a chance that if they were in a hollow they might not get it, provided that I kept near the ridge on my way up. It was a long climb, but though the slopes were steep the going was good, as it was all grass; and after about an hour's stiff

work the reward was at hand, for when I reached the crest of the ridge there were the ibex lying down below in fancied security, soon to be rudely disturbed. Now, the ridge was of course a sky-line, and though it was broken by some friendly rocks, among which I crawled, yet no sooner did I put my head round the corner of one of them than a female ibex spotted me, and immediately getting on her feet, proceeded to stare at me in a way which soon attracted the attention of the others. The big buck was perhaps 120 yards off and lying down, a position which never gives a nice shot; but I was afraid they might bolt at any moment, so taking a steady aim, I pulled the trigger, and—a miss-fire was the result; with a silent but none the less deep anathema upon all gun-makers, I shoved in another cartridge, and lucky it was that I did so instead of trusting to the left barrel, for the next effort resulted in a clean miss. At the shot the buck leapt to his feet and stood for a moment, uncertain which way to turn; a fatal moment for him, as the second barrel caught him fair behind the shoulder, and down he went, rolling and bumping and tumbling over rocks, while I trembled lest his horns should be broken. The rest of the herd poured themselves headlong down the hill, and were soon scaling the opposite side of the valley.

My Kalmak and I scrambled down to the dead beast and cut off his head, a work of some difficulty,

owing to the steepness of the ground and the chance of starting him rolling again. Laden with this and the skin, we returned to our ponies, and so triumphantly down and across a mile or so of flat to camp, on the other side of the Akjas River. The tape gave the horns 52 inches, a really fine head. On the way down I saw a lot more ibex further up the main valley.

The main valley of Akjas, called Big Akjas, to distinguish it from the side valleys, has a length of about sixty miles, and we struck into it some twenty or twenty-five miles from the foot of the hills. The western side above where we came in is covered with bushes, and in some places near the bottom with pine trees, the heavy forest being further down. The predominating growth on this hillside is a horrible thorny thing like a stick covered with spines, which I take to be the "devil's club" of evil fame; but if it isn't, it well deserves to be called so. The ibex ground in Big Akjas is all on the east side, which runs up from the river in a series of grassy slopes broken by cliffs and intersected by innumerable small side-valleys of various sizes and depths. Above the grass the ground is steeper, broken and covered with rocks, and well up among these the ibex usually lie down for the day; but in the early morning they are nearly always on the grass just below the rocks, and can be easily seen from below with—and, indeed, often without—a telescope. To

reach this ground took from one to two hours of pretty stiff climbing from the bottom of the main valley.

Ibex-shooting is never easy work, but Akjas has one great advantage, which is that the hard part never begins until one has seen the game, and this lightens both heart and labour. One simply rides along the main valley, spying at intervals until something worth going after is viewed, and not till then is it necessary to leave the ponies and proceed on foot. Perhaps to fully appreciate ibex-shooting here, it is necessary to have a previous experience of the toil which their pursuit in Baltistan entails.

There is one little Akjas to the east and three to the west, all branches of the main valley. Judging by the amount of water which comes out of them, the three latter are all good-sized valleys, and they are said to hold lots of ibex. The size—often two to three hundred animals or more—and number of the herds really quite beggar description, and, until I actually saw them myself, I confess to having been sceptical on the subject. In the following descriptions of the stalking I have not mentioned half the ibex seen, and their very numbers constitute one of the difficulties, as, if one of the herds is disturbed and goes up the hill, the others are pretty sure to see them and do likewise, so that the stalker has to have an eye to other beasts as well as those which are the immediate object of the chase. The openness of the grass-slopes is another trouble, and

usually necessitates going up one of the little side-valleys for shelter. In them the going is steeper and worse, but on the whole the ground is easy, and there are few places which can be called really dangerous.

Morning is the best time for stalking; after midday the wind commonly becomes very strong and shifty, the sky cloudy, and a fall of rain or, late in the season when we were there, of snow is an almost daily occurrence. Morse had been here in the spring and early summer, and told me that the weather then was very bad and wet, so July and August should be the best months.

During our short stay the weather was very cold, and getting more so daily, and the necessary start before dawn was not an unmixed joy, while using the telescope was unpleasant for half-frozen fingers.

The ibex are, I think, bigger beasts than the Himalayan ones, and are certainly darker in colour, while their hair is shorter and not so woolly, nor have the bucks such a strong smell, even in the late autumn, which is their rutting season. As will be seen, we were there but a very few days, and were moving all the time, which does not give one a fair chance; but a hard-working sportsman, provided that he is a decent shot, should have no difficulty in getting twenty beasts in a month. Of these none should have horns of less than 45 inches, while,

IBEX HEADS

The middle one is 52 inches

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with any luck, four or five of them should be well over 50 inches.

On the morning of the 20th we moved camp a bit further up, Phelps going off early after the ibex seen the evening before, while Morse and I followed later. On the way we saw Phelps and his two men coming down the hill, so waited for him to join us. He had got two ibex with horns of 49 and 45 inches respectively, and had lost another wounded one; but, unfortunately, while following the cripple he had slipped on the hillside and had a very nasty fall, going some way down, and being, indeed, lucky to escape with a bad shaking and a bruised back, though the latter prevented his taking the hill again for some time.

I went up the hill in the evening after a herd which we saw from below; but the wind was very bad, and in the end they got it, so the stalk was a failure, and a steady climb of more than three hours was wasted. I also saw the fresh track of a big bear, but could not find him. It was rather a job getting down the hill in the dark, as the Kalmak did not profess to know the country, which was steep for night-work; but we managed it all right, and, guided by the camp fire, found our way to where the tents were pitched.

Next day we moved again. I started early, and this time took the other Kalmak with me. I never knew his proper name, but used to call

him Durji, and before long took a great fancy to him, as he was very keen, hard-working, and always cheerful. We pretty soon saw a herd at about their usual height on the hill, and started off to stalk them. Owing to the nature of the ground we could never get another look till close to where we had seen them, and when we arrived there, after a rough and stony climb, they had gone. The wind was true, so they must simply have moved of their own accord. The side valley they were in was deep, and if they had left it we must have seen them, so the presumption was that they had gone up, and we proceeded to do so too. The ground was very steep and broken, and we went up and up for another good hour, still seeing nothing, till we began to think that they had gone right away to the higher rocks to lie down for the day; but still we persevered, and at last, peering cautiously over a ridge into a small but deep hollow, we saw two fine bucks within fifty yards of us; the first shot put one *hors de combat*, and then came another miss-fire; number two made off, but the ground was so steep that he could only go slowly, and was also accounted for. A good morning's work and a satisfactory sight they were to a sportsman as they lay almost touching each other at the bottom of the hollow; their horns were $48\frac{1}{2}$ and $46\frac{1}{2}$ inches; and so down the hill happy.

Apropos of the aforesaid miss-fires, I may say that I was shooting with a double ·303 and cartridges supplied by the maker, who has a great name, which I am only restrained from giving by ignorance, and consequently wholesome dread, of the law of libel. Out of every seven or eight cartridges one used to miss-fire, which is altogether inexcusable; it puts one off one's own shooting, and destroys confidence. I shall not refer to this again, but the reader can take it for granted that miss-fires were an all too common occurrence.

Again we moved camp, and I went off with Durji, riding up the main valley. We soon saw one herd, but they were not in a very good place, so we left them alone, and in another mile or so saw another big lot at the top of the grass, just below where the rocks began. We tied up our ponies and started to climb the hill. To keep out of sight we went up a small ravine, which afforded complete shelter, but was so steep and broken up by little cliffs that our progress was slow. At last, after crossing a small but nasty stone slide, with a quite sufficient drop below it, we judged that we were high enough up. The herd we were after was large, some two or three hundred beasts in all, and they were much scattered, and in rather open ground, the bucks being on the further side from us, so before beginning the actual stalk we sat down to wait a bit, on the chance of their moving to a more favourable place. While so

waiting, three bucks appeared on a crest of rocks much higher up, and stood there on the sky-line surveying the more or less grassy slopes below them. Two were big, and they made a fine picture standing there motionless as statues, but none the less keenly on the look-out. We had already been climbing for nearly two hours, and though the actual distance up to the three was not great, at least another good hour of hard work would be necessary to reach their level. We were, of course, in full view, but a long way below; and as we lay quite still, they did not see us, and after half an hour or so, being satisfied that all was safe, they lay down. This was much better business than going after the herd, as, however big its leaders might be, we were quite likely to be separated from them by some of the females, which take the part of ever watchful sentinels, and are always ready to sound their shrill whistle of alarm. Our way up was very steep and rocky, the first twenty yards being in view, but this was cautiously and safely crawled across. The wind was right, so we toiled up and up till we reached a height level with them, and then crept among the rocks towards our unsuspecting prey. As the ground was very broken, and they were lying down, great caution was necessary lest we should come suddenly upon them, and so start them off without time for a shot, so our progress, though sure, was slow. Presently, while

crawling along like a snake, I saw the back of an ibex within twenty yards of me. One of the big fellows had a broken-tipped horn, and as I could see this from where I lay I knew it was all right, so let drive at him. In an instant they were all three on their feet and over the ridge. I jumped up and dashed on. Just on the other side was number one, down, and very sick, so I wasted no time on him. The other two were going over the rocks as only wild goats can, but I managed to put the left barrel into the biggest of them before they turned a corner, hitting him rather far back. Following on as fast as I could—which is not saying much, for the elevation was considerable and the going distinctly rough —I presently got another view of the wounded one, and hit him again, but still did not stop him, so I waited a few minutes to recover my wind before starting on his track, which was pretty clearly marked by blood. Sure enough, before going far, I came upon him standing under a rock, and looking very sick. Ibex, however, have great vitality, and he started off again, but could not face the hill, and when he stopped I put in another shot, which killed him stone dead, so that he lay where he fell. This was lucky, as if he had once started rolling he would have gone down a long way, and his horns would have been broken for a certainty.

I now returned to number one, to find Durji busy with his knife in a state of great contentment, and

when he heard that I had got number two as well, he positively beamed all over. We had left my own man below at the place we had first seen the three from, and he presently arrived, having started up when he heard the first shot.

The original herd, being round the shoulder of the hill, were probably undisturbed, and Durji suggested going to look for them, but I was quite content with two in one day, and besides, the camp was an unknown distance up the valley, so I would not go for them.

Having cut off the heads, which both had horns rather over 47 inches, one with a spread of 33 between the tips, we rolled the bodies down the hill so as not to have to carry the skins further than could be helped. Tired, but cheerful, we descended to the main valley, and went on up it to camp, after a last upward look at the scene of the morning's sport, which, viewed from the bottom, seemed even higher and further away than it was, and induced a not unnatural wish that ibex would condescend to inhabit less inaccessible places.

We were now near the head of the valley, and stayed here one day. Durji went out with Morse, who saw a leopard, but did not get it. I took the other Kalmak and went off to look for ibex. As usual, it did not take long—about half an hour's ride from camp—before I found a herd with the telescope, so we started on the ordinary two hours or more

of preliminary uphill work; but when we arrived on what should have been the scene of action, the ibex were gone. Presently I saw a female on the edge of a narrow valley, into which she disappeared, about 400 yards away. Now, if I had known the ground well, I could easily have got a shot by running down, as the valley was very deep, though narrow; but this I did not know, so went slowly, and the herd, concealed hitherto, all walked up the other side, just too far off for a shot. They did not go far, but eventually lay down in a position where they were quite unassailable, as the cliff stopped any near approach from above and one side, while the wind and the open ground did the same in other directions; so I began to look about for more, and soon made out two other herds. One of these only consisted of some thirty beasts or so, but some of the bucks were very big; in fact, I was pretty sure that two of them had horns well over 50 inches. The only possible way of stalking them involved a long climb up, and a very considerable détour; so, as the Kalmak was rather elderly, with bad eyesight, and not very good on his feet, I decided to spare him the walk and leave him behind, only taking my own man with me. This was a mistake as it turned out, but I did not then know how big a fool the man was; so after carefully impressing upon him on no account to move until we returned, no matter how long we might be gone, we started.

The stalk proved to be even longer and more difficult than I had anticipated, as the ground was in places very open, and so we had to crawl a good deal, which is not a rapid mode of progression, especially uphill. Also, we had to get in and out of a deep side-valley; the sides of this were covered with fresh snow, fallen during the night, which took some time and care to negotiate. At last, about four hours after leaving the Kalmak, all difficulties were surmounted, and only 500 yards of broken and very easy ground separated us from the ibex, which were also a little below us—altogether a most favourable position.

Getting a shot now seemed to be an absolute certainty, so I sat down for a few minutes to rest and get my wind into shooting form before going on, as one very quickly gets blown at anything over 10,000 feet, and this at a venture was near 12,000. But in sport there is many a slip between cup and lip, and this was destined to be one of the slips, owing to the idiotcy of the Kalmak. The herd I had originally started after were now far below and lying down, but suddenly they all got on their feet, and after a look down the valley began to move off up the hill away from me. I also looked down to see the cause of this, and there was that miserable Kalmak calmly walking up a grass flat in the middle; he had on a black coat and was a most conspicuous object. I still hoped against hope that

my lot might give me time to get up to them, but it was not to be; they saw the others move, or the Kalmak, probably both, and were off too. As soon as they passed a ridge I ran in, thinking that possibly they might slow down on the other side; but no, the Kalmak was still full in view, and when I reached the top of the rising ground they were well on their way up another hill, and all chance was gone.

Words fail to express one's feelings on occasions like this; being of that sanguine temperament which alone induces men to undergo the toil of hill shikar, I had already regarded one, and with any luck both, of the big bucks as my own. It was indeed a bitter moment, and in a very unamiable frame of mind I started down the hill. The Kalmak, having done all the harm possible, had now retreated; he was as blind as a bat, but would hardly have failed to see all those ibex when they moved, so I suppose he realised that he was not likely to be blessed. When we got down to him, tired and disappointed, he severely tried the scanty remains of temper left to me by swearing that he had never moved, a statement which so exasperated me that I with difficulty refrained from kicking him; later on he confessed his fault, and said that we had been gone so long that he came to look for us, in spite of all orders to the contrary.

Sadly we returned to camp, where Durji, on being

told of the day's misadventures, proceeded to curse his brother Kalmak in a way which reduced that individual to complete silence and almost to tears; of course I don't know what he said, but it sounded most satisfactory, and did me quite a lot of good to listen to.

In the morning I had found an old horn, so big that I should much have liked to measure it properly, but as I returned to camp a different way I did not get it. I only measured it roughly with my hand, but am sure that it was nearly 60 inches in length; the present record is a horn of 56 inches, from the Tagdumbash Pamir.

Next morning we started down the valley again, and I went off with Durji and one of our own men on what turned out to be a very long day of fruitless labour. Riding along down the river bank, we pretty soon saw ibex above, and as the telescope showed some of them to be big, we left the ponies and went up the hill. While we were engaged in trying to stalk the herd seen from below, four very fine bucks made their appearance on a small plateau of grass much further up, so we changed our plans and went for them instead. To get to them we had to go a long way down and round, as a ravine of almost sheer cliff stopped a direct advance; but no matter, they looked worth some hard work, and we went. Unfortunately, the wind was very shifty, and a puff of it probably spoilt the

performance, for when we arrived, the four were nowhere to be seen; we spent some time looking for them, but without success. I found the fresh remains of a small buck, which had been killed and nearly all eaten by a leopard; so fresh was it that the leopard and not the wind may have been accountable for the disappearance of the four. We then went after another herd, but for some reason or another, possibly the leopard again, they were very restless, and after moving two or three times finally went off into the higher rocks, where we did not think it worth while to follow them.

The morning was now getting on, but Durji was not to be beaten, and proposed that he and I should go on along the higher ground, while the other man went down to take the ponies on to a place which we pointed out to him. I foresaw a hard day in front, but it would never have done for me to yield in keenness to Durji, so I agreed. We did two or three miles of very bad walking, including a climb in and out of a deep side-valley, which was a mass of fallen rocks, before seeing anything, and then saw a large herd at the top of the grass slopes a good bit further on. They were in a very stalkable place, though we had to go further up the hill to get the cover of the rocky ground there, as the grass was too open; but no matter, there they were, though, unfortunately, when we got near to where we had seen them, it was a case of there they were

not. They had certainly not gone up, or we must have seen them, and there was only one side-valley where they could be, so we started up it, keeping high up along the ledges of a cliff, and hoping to see them below us. Eventually we did so, and immediately formed ourselves into a committee of ways and means to consider how to get at them. Though my knowledge of Turki is very limited indeed, and Durji's was rather so too, we eked it out with signs, and never had much difficulty in understanding each other. There was no use trying to get round below them ; the wind was hopeless for that, so there remained only a more or less direct descent from where we were. The hillside was here a mass of small precipices ; also, the herd being a large one and much scattered made it difficult to keep out of view. There were three bucks, one a very fine one, lying on a projecting spur of rock, and these were our objective ; but when, with some risk and much trouble, we had got within a long two hundred yards of them we stuck altogether, it being impossible to get further down without being seen—indeed, only a chimney had enabled us to get so far. It was not at all a nice shot, as the buck was lying down against a stone ; but there it was, to take it or leave it, so I took it. The buck jumped up, and I had only just time to fire the second barrel at him before he was hidden by an intervening lump of rock. He staggered heavily, and we were sure he

was hit. Down we went to the place, but we could make nothing of it. No blood, and where the tracks were visible among the rocks they were too confused to follow; female ibex kept bobbing in and out among the cliffs above, but they were of no interest to us, and of the big fellow there was not a sign. We went down to the bottom, thinking that he might have fallen over; but if so we couldn't find him, so decided to give it up and go down, as it was now rather late and camp an unknown distance away. Being at the bottom of the side-valley, we kept on down it, not wanting to toil up on to the ridge again, and this let us in for more than we had bargained for, as when we were within a thousand feet of the main valley we were stopped by a cliff. It was only a hundred feet or so, but more than enough.

Vainly we tried to find a way down or along the obstacle. At the risk of my neck I went some distance along a ledge which overhung the small abyss—a path used by ibex, but not nice for a man, as it was only just wide enough to stand on, and the cliff at the back was also sheer and smooth. Presently I came upon a break in the ledge four or five feet wide, and this defeated me altogether; nothing but an ibex could go that way with reasonable safety; and even if I could manage it, I doubted if the Kalmak would be able to follow, as he was a good deal shorter than I am, so had not so long a

reach. Anyway it was not good enough, as there might be even worse places further on, and I had no desire to form the chief part of a funeral, so with some difficulty I turned round and made my way back again. By now we were both rather done, and turned our faces uphill again in a silence more eloquent than words, having to go back nearly all the way we had come down before we could get on to the ridge. After that it was comparatively plain sailing. Durji, I may say, was a Koksu man, and did not profess to know Akjas; hence the error of trying the valley. The moral of this is that the ridges are usually easiest, and should be used to descend, unless the other way is known to be practicable. Happy were we to reach the ponies and our long-deferred lunch at five o'clock; but our troubles were not yet over. Camp was somewhere down the main valley, but how far we knew not. It soon got dark, but still we rode and rode without seeing the longed-for fires. Having no food and only light wraps, I was not at all prepared to sleep out, so we stuck to it, and at last, while riding along a path some way up the western hillside, we saw a fire below. Hurrah! Down we went, leading the ponies through a pine wood, and tumbling over dead trees, quite regardless of bruises — for was not supper at hand?—till the bottom was reached, and then we could not find the fire! We shouted and shouted, but got no answer, so, concluding that it

must have been lit by horse thieves, who put it out when they heard us, we went on down and reached camp in another two miles or so, by which time it was nearly eleven o'clock. It turned out that some of the men had gone up to look for us, lighted that deceptive fire, and then, like idiots, gone away again, leaving it to die out. An hour's ride in the morning, ten hours' walking and climbing on the high ground, followed by a six hours' ride in the dark to top up with, is a pretty hard day's work.

So much for Akjas. Two easy marches took us to the foot of the valley, and two more saw us back at Kukturuk on October 28th. The faithful Durji was much distressed that I had not got a decent stag after coming so far, and lamented that I had not been with him in his native Koksu during the calling season, saying that in that case I would certainly have got three or four. Even now he vowed it was not too late, and was confident of being able to show me a good stag or two, so I decided to go and have a try.

CHAPTER VIII.

WAPITI AND IBEX

The other two said they would go up to Yulduz by a short cut, try for the sheep there, and then come back by the Naret Pass and Kunges Valley; but this idea they afterwards gave up as being too cold a job for November, and went to Jilgalong for roe deer instead.

On the last day of October I started, taking, of course, only a small tent, and travelling as light as possible, the Koksu roads being said to be very bad.

An easy day's ride took us to the entrance of Koksu, a deep and imposing gorge, into which we descended next morning, fording the Koksu River, and then turning up the valley on a pretty rough path, an earnest of worse to follow. Before mid-day I was met by the head Kalmak of Koksu, a very nice old fellow, who had an aül ready pitched for me, and advised me to stay there for the night, saying that the road in front was for a long way very bad, and that there was not time enough left to reach a good camping-ground. Next day the

chief Kalmak accompanied me part of the way to see all safe over the worst part of it. Certainly, the badness of the road had not been at all exaggerated; it ran high up along the hillside, and was narrow and precipitous. In two or three places there was not room for a loaded pony to pass, so everything had to be taken off; but the good old chief had sent a lot of men to assist, so this did not take long. After crossing a spur we scrambled and slid down a steep and stony zigzag track into a side-valley, after which things were a bit better. Up this valley we turned, threading our way through a large pine forest; and after a march of nine hours in all, camped just above the last pine trees, three or four miles from the top. It was a cold spot; some milk which we had brought up froze solid during dinner. I saw some old shed horns here, and Durji told me that once it was a great place for stags, but that none came there now.

Next day we turned out of this side-valley into another over a pass of about 11,000 feet, the north side of which was already covered with snow, and thence descended again by a very steep path to Big Koksu, another nine hours' march for the ponies. On the way down we saw a large herd of ibex, but they were in a hopeless place, so, after watching them for a time, we went on. One of the bucks was very big, certainly well the far side of 50 inches, and had a most remarkable spread of

horn; as Durji remarked, they grew out from his head, more as if he had been a sheep than an ibex, and it was with some regret that I abandoned the attempt to obtain them.

Further on we saw another big buck, a single one this time, and we went a long way down and round to try for him, but he was travelling too fast, and we could not come up with him. In the end I reached camp some time after dark, having had a long and rough walk for nothing.

Camp was by the bank of the Koksu River, near a large pool of clear, blue water, which should hold fish, though I saw none. Below this the river runs through a cliff-bound gorge, which is passable only when the ice bears.

In the morning we crossed the river by a deep and bad ford. The bottom was all boulders, among which the ponies stumbled about so that it was rather a wet job, and a cold one too. Just after crossing one of the ponies fell off the path and very nearly went into the river, and some time was wasted getting his load off and hauling him up again. We then went on up a big side-valley, where it was necessary to climb up and along the hillside, so much so, indeed, that we all got off our ponies and walked bits of the way. The path is indeed a rough one when a native of the Tekkes prefers his own two legs to his pony's four!

After some eight or ten miles of this we got

down to the stream again, and pitched camp on a small flat by the side of it. Here we were at the wapiti ground, and my hopes had already been raised by seeing the track of a good stag on the hill just above.

In the afternoon Durji proposed going out to have a look, so away we went, floundering in and out of the stream for a mile, and then scrambling up the hill, the first part of which was just practicable for the wonderfully sure-footed ponies. After tying up the ponies in a convenient hollow, Durji and I went on up a ridge and settled ourselves down to watch the surrounding country and enjoy the last of the afternoon sun. As the valley we had left was both deep and narrow, the bottom of it only got the sun for an hour or two in the middle of the day, but we were now well up the hill. From our post we could see a great extent of ground. Opposite, looking south, was the valley where camp was, and, first, pine forests and grassy glades, then cliffs, and above all the snow, while on either hand of our ridge were side-valleys, both said to be good places. Presently the sun went behind a hill, and immediately it turned very cold, while a nasty, penetrating little wind began to blow. I had foolishly left my sheepskin coat with the ponies, and now simply shivered when I sat, or rather crouched, against a rock. It was getting dark, and I was nearly frozen, when two white

objects appeared among the bushes on the far side of the upper little valley. Joy! two stags, no doubt. The big telescope was hastily produced, and the remains of the rapidly fading light just served to show that one of them was a really big stag, the other a small fellow.

Stag wapiti are in the late autumn and winter very light-coloured; in fact, from above they look almost white. The hinds are much darker, and the difference can be seen at once with the naked eye almost as far as the beasts themselves are visible.

Of course, it was far too late to do anything, so after waiting till it grew quite dark, for fear of being seen as we retired, we returned to camp in cheerful mood, Durji full of confidence, saying I should shoot the big stag next day for sure, I myself less certain of it, but hopeful.

Next day, accompanied by two other Kalmaks, we started before four o'clock, in black darkness, and, having reached our yesterday's post of observation, we sat down to wait for dawn. It was bitterly cold, and I was nearly frozen, in spite of a heavy fur coat; but when, after what seemed hours, it began to get light, there was the big stag feeding alone on a grass patch among some bushes close to where we had seen him the evening before. His smaller companion had apparently gone elsewhere during the night, as we saw no more of him.

The hillside which the stag was on was mostly

covered with bushes about six feet high; but the leaf was now all off, and the only thick places were the north sides of some little rocky ridges, where there were a few scattered pine trees, the heavy forest not beginning till some way further down.

As yet there was nothing to be done till the stag should settle down for the day, so we lay in a small hollow behind a sheltering rock, and admired him through the telescope. He was worth looking at, too—twelve points and a great spread of horn—and even the Kalmaks agreed in saying that he was very big, and it may be imagined how eagerly I longed for a shot, and how I hoped I might make a good one when the critical moment came.

Meanwhile, it was interesting to watch the precautions which this noble beast took for his safety. Having finished his morning feed, he went into the bushes, and stood there listening for a space, after which he lay down; but this was only a ruse, for from time to time up went his head, and it was not until he had shifted his position three times that he finally made up his mind that all was right, and went off to a small clump of pine trees to lie down for the day, by which time it was ten o'clock.

Now was the sportsman's opportunity. After giving him half an hour or so to go to sleep, we left one Kalmak on the watch, and having safely crawled over a short space of ground which was in view, we started off. Right glad was I to stretch

my cramped-up limbs again and get my feet warm, for up till now they were almost devoid of sensation.

Long, steep, and up and down was the détour which we had to cover, and not till nearly three o'clock did we get near the end; but at last only one ridge separated us from the stag's resting-place. With the glass, I could see the watching Kalmak lying by his rock; he made no sign, so we knew that the stag was still there, and waited some time in the hope he would get up to feed before it got dusk. It grew late, and the wind, never very steady, began to get more shifty, but still the stag did not move; so finally we decided that I should creep up to the last ridge, while Durji went round above and tried to shift him out towards me. This all worked out beautifully. After a due interval, I heard Durji shout to warn me—a most unnecessary proceeding, as I was all eyes and ears—and the stag appeared about 400 yards off, heading through the bushes towards me. At first he was travelling fast, but soon settled down to a walk, seeming rather inclined to go further up the hill, which would not have mattered much, as in that case I must have got a shot, though possibly rather a long one. My great fear was that he would turn down, and so be lost to view, as the ground that way was a hollow, into which I could not see. When a bit over 100 yards off he stood still, undecided which way to turn,

facing nearly straight to where I lay concealed. Afraid to wait longer, I covered the point of his shoulder, and, chancing a few intervening branches, let drive. A heavy stumble in answer to the shot showed a hit, and gave me time to loose off the second barrel; he turned down the hill, and was at once out of sight. I dashed down the ridge, reloading as I ran, and getting a glimpse of his back, fired another shot, which, as I afterwards found, hit him in the ribs too far back. The first shot had broken his shoulder, and the second, hurried and high, had gone through his ear.

The ridge ended abruptly in a small cliff, and when I arrived there the stag was already a long way below, but going slowly, and obviously hard hit. Being so much above him, the bushes were not much hindrance to my view, and I could see the whole length of his back, so I sat down to try and stop his career. Resting the rifle on my knees, the first shot was a miss, but the second broke his hip, and down he went. He must have been nearly 400 yards away, and this shows the advantage of the ·303 rifle, one of which I was using. But the first shot of all hit him fair on the point of the shoulder, and if it had been from a ·450 would probably have finished the business at once.

Getting down as quickly as possible, a shot behind the shoulder finished him, and I had time to admire his horns and congratulate myself on my good

luck, though feeling somewhat ashamed of such an inartistic performance. Not, however, till later did I realise what a prize I had got—twelve points and a little snag, which may almost be reckoned a thirteenth, massive and wide, with a great development of the fourth tine, and a slight palmation of the tops. This head is, taken all round, the finest specimen of an Asiatic wapiti which I have seen, and as the horns are an article of trade, I afterwards saw lots of them in Kuldja.

Durji and the other Kalmak soon arrived, and we congratulated one another, Durji at first trying to conceal his delight under a "There, I told you so" sort of air, which he could not keep up; while the other Kalmak, a cheerful soul and a great friend of mine, kept pointing out the ridge to him, and wondering at the distance.

It was nearly dark by the time we had got off the head and skin, but little cared I now for rough paths or cold. The Kalmak whom we had left behind managed to get the ponies up within half a mile of us, so presently we started for camp, arriving there late and tired, and wet-footed from the deep fords on the way down the stream, but withal a very cheerful party.

Having got what I wanted, I would now have been quite willing to leave Koksu, and go to Jilgalong for roe deer; but the energetic Durji, who, of course, did not mind the cold at all, was

WAPITI HEAD (54 INCHES)

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bent on my getting another stag and some ibex as well, saying that the ibex here were even bigger than the Akjas ones, and that it was a pity to come so far and not shoot a few of them. Certainly there were lots of ibex, and big ones too, but it was now altogether too late in the year to face the high and steep ground of the valley I was in, and, as will be seen, I did no good with them.

Next morning, November 6th, I did not go out, as our men were busy mending their foot-gear with the stag's skin, so I amused myself writing up my diary, first having to thaw the ink over a fire, though it was twelve o'clock, and the sun was out; besides, the ink-bottle had been most carefully wrapped up.

In the afternoon we went out and saw some ibex, also an enormous brown bear, but all on the other side of a deep valley, and far out of reach. It came on to blow hard, and was so cold on the ridge where we were that we gave it up and returned.

I do not think that the bears here are the same as the red bear of the Himalayas. This one looked to me much bigger, and being only about half a mile beyond the ibex, I had something to compare him with the size of which I knew. Also the natives say they are very savage, which the Himalayan red bear certainly is not, rarely if ever assuming the offensive, even when wounded.

The following day we moved camp a bit further

up the valley, but saw nothing worth going after. It blew so hard at night that we dared not have a big camp fire, for fear of setting the whole place alight with flying sparks; so I turned in early, bed being the only place where there was a chance of keeping warm. The wind lasted all night, bringing snow up with it towards morning; and all next day it was too bad to go out, so it was an off-day for all hands.

On the morning after the blizzard there was still a little snow falling; but the day turning out fair, we moved camp a little further up still, and in the afternoon went out to look for ibex. We saw several herds, and started to try and stalk one lot; but it was then rather late in the day and intensely cold. So when my boots were frozen hard, and feet quite numb, I gave it up, being afraid of frost-bite.

Up in the valleys the cold was by now pretty severe. One's hands, if wet, froze instantly to any piece of metal touched, and one's moustache became attached to the edge of the glass while in the act of drinking.

On the 10th we saw lots of ibex, but none within reach, the days being now too short for this sport, as the ground was very steep and much cut up by deep valleys, which made it difficult to get about quickly enough. The snow was just beginning to go in a few exposed places, but clear nights and cloudy days delayed its disappearance.

We did manage to bring off a stalk on the 11th, but it was not a very successful one, as the ibex saw us just too soon, and, of course, began to move. I lay down to shoot, but the hillside being steep, I kept slipping down it in the fresh snow, until at last Durji, seeing my predicament, held my feet, when I hit one buck but did not get him. The herd went off up the hill and scattered out in every direction, not, however, all going right away; for, as Durji said, they seldom heard a shot or saw a man up here, and hardly knew what to make of it. With the glasses I saw a big buck and three females lie down again further up, so we went on, and after another two hours' climb got there, when I shot the buck all right—horns, 47 inches. The snow had made the going very dangerous in places, and we nearly came to grief once or twice, one scree with a cliff below being particularly nasty to cross. Even Durji reluctantly confessed that the season for ibex-shooting was now about over. On our way down we saw ten or twelve hinds and a small stag, the only deer seen since the 5th. There were a few tracks in places, but nothing like what there should have been, and Durji was much disgusted and puzzled at their absence; but we had found an old camp-fire and a horse's track in one place, so thought that some other shikari must have been there. This turned out to be the case, and on our way back we met him, a Kazak, going up for the

skins of two stags he had shot during the calling season, which skins he had hidden under rocks.

Next day we had another try after ibex, but just when we were getting on terms with them they moved and took up a position all approach to which was barred by the wind. The Kalmaks then proposed trying to drive them, but this, as I expected, turned out a failure.

I had now had enough of it, and wanted to get back to a less rigorous climate, and again be able to take some of my clothes off at night instead of having to put more on. So next day we returned down the valley to the camp from which I had shot the stag, and another short march took us down to Big Koksu. The drift ice coming down had in places jammed and then frozen up solid, so we crossed the river on an ice-bridge, which would have borne a siege train, though the river was not yet frozen over where the current was swift. The stream in the side-valley we had left was a rapid one, and was frozen along the sides, but not in the middle. It was girth deep, and had to be forded about once in every hundred yards, which was most unpleasant. If the ponies reached the edge of the ice without falling through, they nearly always stumbled in getting off it into the water, so one's feet were always wet, and a nailed shooting-boot is not the warmest of footgear, even when not covered with a thin coating of ice.

Both days I tried to stalk ibex, but without success. It is either their custom at this season of the year to be always on the move, or else the broken weather had unsettled them ; for they never stopped long enough in one place to give one any chance of getting up to them, and it is poor fun climbing up a hill for hours only to find that your game has moved on.

If the descent to the big river had seemed pretty steep, the ascent from it was well calculated to strengthen the impression, as a whole day's toil still left us some distance from the top of the pass. This we crossed on the 16th, going on down to the bottom of the side valley, and camping just before the bad bit of road was reached. The whole place was white with snow, and camp comfortless enough. On the pass we met some of Durji's sheep in charge of his son on their way to winter quarters up the valley.

The good old chief Kalmak had again sent men to help us over the bad places, and himself met us just the other side, coming on down with us to the entrance of the Koksu Valley, and offering to have an aül pitched for me.

Here I heard from the other two of their change of plans, and decided to follow them along the foothills, looking for roe deer on the way.

The weather being cold, and my small tent but a cramped dwelling-place, I arranged with the chief

to have a small aül made and sent after me as soon as possible. It eventually reached me on the 28th, pretty quick work, as by then I had travelled some way. He said he could supply me with one ready made, but as I found that this meant turning out a family till a new one could be made for them, I said no.

CHAPTER IX.

ROE DEER

I MADE no stay, but next morning, November 18th, started along the foot-hills which here form a high and undulating plateau intersected in places by deep narrow valleys, the sides of some of which are almost perpendicular. As there were pine trees both above and below the route we followed, I suppose its average elevation must have been between seven and eight thousand feet.

Three short marches took as many days, but we saw no roe deer to speak of, only a few does. The Kazaks had but recently left the neighbourhood, and the whole place was stamped flat by their herds, so the cry was still forward.

November 21st was a very bad day. To begin with, it was blowing a full gale of wind, and this nearly decided us to wait, as just in front was a belt of pine forest full of dead trees, and these kept coming down in a most alarming manner. However, we risked it, and got through all right, only two or three trees falling near us, though the constant crash of others was in no way reassuring; they

had been killed by one of the not infrequent forest fires.

Later on it snowed as well, and was bitterly cold on the more exposed part of the upland we were crossing, so we pitched camp rather short of our intended halting-place. The weather moderating a little towards evening, Durji and I sallied forth and saw a good few roe deer, but no buck.

About here a few wild sheep still survive, and I saw some of their tracks during the day, but they are very scarce and hard to find. I also saw the fresh track of a big tiger.

The next day was fine, still and clear, with a hot sun, quite a different climate, though six inches of fresh snow on the ground kept our feet cool, and a heavy bank of clouds in the north seemed to threaten more bad weather to come. Snow is nothing, but when it blows it is simply perishing.

We moved camp on a mile or two to a more sheltered place, and here Durji said there were sure to be lots of roe deer, as it was undisturbed, and a spot much favoured by them, but the small number of tracks in the snow told a different story. For some reason or other the roe had gone elsewhere, and in two days we only saw one decent buck, at which I did not get a shot.

We saw a big wild boar one morning, of course across a ravine, and there were signs of a few

wapiti about, but I took only a limited interest in them, as roe were what I now wanted.

The second day we had a very long tramp through the snow, including one hill the mere recollection of which is exhausting; the horses were not at the appointed place in the evening, and we reached camp long after dark, quite worn out.

Things now began to look gloomy, and the faithful Durji was in despair, saying that he could not imagine where in the world all the roe had got to. We knew there were plenty somewhere, and it was the more annoying as the bucks began to shed their horns towards the end of November, so there was no time to be lost.

To push on towards Jilgalong seemed to be the best chance, so next day we did a long march, camping just above West Jilgalong, Jilgalong being really three valleys, known as east, middle, and west. Durji and I went a different way the last part of the day and saw a fair roe buck, but I only got a long shot and missed it. We were not quite sure where camp was, and took a wrong turn in the dark, which wasted some time, besides necessitating the passage of a pine forest, during which my pony in jumping a fallen tree struck my face against a branch with such force as nearly to knock me off over his tail. However, at last we reached the tents and were greeted by the men with the

cheering news that they had seen several herds of roe quite close by.

Next morning I sent the camp on some miles into West Jilgalong, and went to look for the aforesaid herds of roe; but though I saw plenty, fortune was still against me. To begin with, I wounded a buck and never got him, though we followed the track for hours, and in the evening I repeated the same performance; the latter one, however, Durji, armed with an axe in case of meeting a tiger, followed again and found the next day. It ought to have been dead, as the blood track was thick, and it turned out to be hit right through the middle; but though unable to walk, it was still alive when he found it, so they must be tough little beasts. This day we saw some hinds and a small stag, also the fresh track of a big tiger; indeed, while in Jilgalong I saw tiger-tracks nearly every day, and there must have been several about. On this occasion when we got back to the horses at dark, the Kalmak left in charge of them said that he had seen the tiger which had come after the horses, and that he had had to take them out into the open on the hill, which may or may not have been true; personally I doubted the statement, putting it down to his imagination and recollection of the story of a man who rode forth alone to the chase near here and has never been heard of since. I would much have liked to get a chance at one of these tigers, as,

judging by their pugs, they were big, and in that cold climate must have very fine skins, but barring a lucky chance, could think of no way of doing so. The country here is just about the bottom of the pine forest level, so that there are other trees and bushes as well, and these make the jungle very thick, while the size of the covers and the nature of the ground preclude the idea of beating, even if men could be got; also the place swarms with wolves which would be sure to kill any beast tied out for the nobler animal.

The herds of roe deer usually number from five to ten or twelve animals, with one or two bucks; but the latter often go alone, or two together, when of course they are easier to stalk. The Siberian roe is much bigger than the European one. A fair buck's horns have six points, *i.e.* three on each, and should be 15 to 16 inches or more in length; but seven, eight, and occasionally nine pointers occur. The doe's cry of alarm is a shrill bark, while that of the buck is much deeper and more guttural—so much so that it might be made by a different animal altogether. As a rule they are on the move morning and evening, but spend the day lying down, either in the forest, or at this season of the year under the shadow of the trees at the edge of it, and they seem to prefer being on the snow, for I hardly ever saw them lying on the bare patches. Though we saw some four or five herds this day, it must not

be supposed that they are easy to get at. The ground, as I have said before, is much broken up, and the evening stalk involved a hard climb of two or three hours to get on terms with them.

On the following day I saw a lot of wolves busy hunting some roe deer, but as they all went round the corner I did not see the finish of the chase. Two bucks alone together gave me a very easy stalk, as they were below me, so that the snow was rather an assistance than otherwise, all the slipping being in the right direction. The shot resulted in the death of one buck. I ought to have got both, but missed number two with the second barrel. And I did nearly the same thing the next evening, getting one buck, which rolled down the hill, shedding his already loose horns *en route*, and hitting another hard. It was too late to follow him down; but in the morning we did so, and a long chase he gave us before we came up with him in some bushes, when I made a worse than execrable shot, and smashed off both his horns just above the burr, so that though another shot accounted for him, he was not much to look at when got.

On the way back, while we were crossing an ice-bridge over a stream, it broke, and let Durji and me in up to the waist; it was pretty chilly, even for a Kalmak, but luckily we were close to camp.

On the 29th we only saw a few scattered does all day; so on the 30th we moved on into middle

SIBERIAN ROE DEER

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Jilgalong, a long day's march. The last few days the weather had been much better, and on any open ground which faced south the snow was nearly all gone again, though in the woods and on the north-lying slopes there was still more than enough of it. My aül had arrived, and so I was on the whole fairly comfortable, being able to have a fire indoors now, instead of dining out by the camp one.

The first day at middle Jilgalong was a distinct disappointment, as we only saw three or four does, and Durji again looked sad, but cheered up on our return, when we met a Kalmak whom we had sent out in the other direction to have a look, and who had seen lots of roe and a stag too. Next morning we saw several lots of roe, and I stalked and shot a fair buck, whose horns were so loose that they came off in my hand. At the shot, some wapiti higher up the hill crossed from one cover to another, giving us a fair though rather distant view. There were about thirty hinds and two stags, one of which the glasses showed to be a pretty good one, and we hoped for a closer acquaintance with him on the morrow. An evening stalk after more roe was a failure, owing to the wind; but having now got two pretty good ones, I was able to bear it philosophically.

The ground here was easier than in West Jilgalong, as there was not so much bush jungle, always difficult to get through, and the edges of the pine

woods being consequently more clearly defined, the roe were easier to see, while there were not so many dead stalks of hemlock and other tall plants, the tops of which in some places reached as high as one's head when on horseback, and were so brittle that they crackled and broke noisily with the slightest touch.

On the following day we started out with the intention of going to look for the stag; but the sky was heavily overcast with clouds on the higher ground where we had seen him and the mist there was so thick that we gave it up, and turned our attention to the roe deer instead. The only herd visible were some way off, and not in a very good place, but after a long crawl I got within 100 yards of where they were lying. There were two bucks, one of which I killed dead with the first barrel, hitting the other hard with the second; but the wounded one we did not get, as before we had followed him far it came on to snow heavily, and the track was soon completely obliterated. It was still early in the day but there was no more to be done, so we turned our faces campwards, and eventually arrived there in rather a draggled condition. Luckily the way was plain, as it was snowing so fast that we could not see fifty yards in front of us.

All afternoon and part of the night it continued to snow more or less steadily, only stopping towards morning; but then the sky was still black with

clouds, and there was some eighteen inches of fresh snow on the ground, so we decided to leave, as a further fall would have made our road very bad. Anyway I had had almost enough of roe shooting; as though it is pretty sport, it is of no absorbing interest, and the weather was by now too cold for crawling about in the snow to be enjoyable. A long march down took us clear of the snow, and next day, December 5th, after another ten miles or so, made rather unpleasant by a gale of wind, we reached the foot of the Jilgalong valley, where the other two were now camped.

They had shot a lot of roe deer, also two pigs, which the Kalmaks ate, much to the disgust of our Mahommedan followers.

CHAPTER X.

KUNGES TO KULDJA

On December 7th we moved on some seven miles to the foot of the Kunges. Here we paid off our Kalmaks, Durji and I parting with, I think, mutual regret, while he expressed a hope that some day I might again revisit the Tekkes and do a month or two's shooting with him in Koksu.

We spent several days about here, moving our camp across the Tekkes River on the 14th. The ford was deep in spite of the river being divided into three channels; but the bottom was good, consisting of firm gravel, so there were none of the customary but none the less distressing slipping and stumbling over boulders. From time to time we shifted our camp on a little, and used to go pheasant-shooting most days. There were a great many pheasants about, but as we did not know what to do with a lot, if we shot them, we only used to go out for two or three hours in the afternoon, usually getting about twenty pheasants and a few hares. Our best bag was twenty-seven, and four hares, but if we had cared to, I think we could have got from eighty to

KALMAK WEDDING

KALMAKS

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a hundred pheasants in the day. The cover was high scrub, with a few small trees in places, one of them a thorn with a yellow berry, near which birds were always plentiful. We used to beat with some of our own men, assisted by a lot of Kazaks and Kirghiz. The difficulty of making them keep any sort of line was great, as they wanted to see the fun, the art of shooting flying being new to them, and much applauded, whilst our retrievers were a lasting puzzle, as they could never understand how a dog was taught to bring a bird instead of eating it. One day we received a visit from some Lamas. There is a monastery in the Kash valley, and two of the chief men came to see us, bringing the customary gift of silk scarves—pretty but flimsy—which are the usual complimentary offering. They asked many questions about Thibet, and were much interested in us.

More snow fell at intervals, till the covers became very hard to beat, so we decided to move on into winter quarters at Kuldja, shooting our last pheasants near a ferry, by which the Ili river is crossed again, at about thirty miles above the town, the total distance from Kunges to Kuldja being fifty miles. The use of oars being unknown, the boat at the said ferry was towed by horses, which swam the river to do it, a cruel business in such weather; how the poor brutes stand the cold Heaven only knows, as the water was covered with

blocks of floating ice. The day was dull and windy, while the thermometer showed a temperature of from −12° downwards at night.

Here we were delayed one day by a gale of wind, and afterwards the journey into Kuldja, which we accomplished in three very easy marches, was made unpleasant by the same cause, a tearing wind and driving snow not being nice to ride against. Blizzards are said to be the rule, not the exception, in this part of the valley.

We reached Kuldja on December 24th, and on Christmas Day first heard of the Transvaal War. The Russian postmaster told us of it, and gave us all the news he could. He spoke German, which language Morse also understood, and so we got a considerable amount of information; but being derived from the Russian *Official Gazette*, which only contains what the Government thinks proper for the people to know, it was all so one-sided that we ended by believing very little of it.

We managed to hit off the severest winter known for years, and as the real cold, 30° to 40° below zero, was now setting in, we were glad to get a very fair house, built during the Russian occupation of Kuldja. The landlord was a most exorbitant scoundrel, a Russian Sart, and began by asking five times the rent which he eventually took. There is a coal-mine some fifteen miles away, and so there was no lack of fuel. Wood is scarce in the neighbourhood.

MORSE'S SHIKARI

FERRY NEAR KULDJA

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Kuldja is not now much of a place, as though a good deal of trade still comes through from China to Russia, the town has lost the importance which it once possessed as the head of a thriving district; and the traces of the great rebellion against the Chinese are visible on all sides, where many miles of cultivation have been abandoned, and the fruit trees have either been cut down or have died for want of the necessary irrigation, while roofless ruins of villages and houses are scattered all about.

The rebellion took place, I believe, in 1850, and began with the complete success of the rebels, who wiped out all the Chinese, to the number, it is said, of 30,000. Most of them were in Swidong, a town some twenty miles to the north-west of Kuldja, which is now the official headquarters of the district, and presumably felt safe behind walls; but their powder magazine had been mined before the revolt began, and once it was blown up they were done for. After the massacre of the Chinese was over, the inhabitants seem to have taken to killing each other, and to have been very successful at it too. Anyway, Russia occupied the country to keep order, and when the Chinese ransomed it back again, and peacefully reoccupied the district, there were very few survivors left. Russia kept a considerable slice of land down the Ili as an additional honorarium.

The Chinese have never settled the country up again, in spite of all inducements to do so held out

to them by their authorities. The chief reason for this is that they fear Russia will soon take permanent charge, and do not care to live under foreign rule.

There is a Russian Consulate at Kuldja, but while we were there the vice-consul was in charge, and was very civil to us. There is also a Roman Catholic Mission, the missionaries in charge of which—Messrs. Steinman and Smidt—were more than kind and hospitable to the strangers near their gate, and in their society we passed many pleasant hours. Indeed, if it had not been for them, time would have hung but heavily on Phelps's hands while I was away in Tashkent. They both spoke English as well as French, and long were our discussions in a mixture of languages as to the justice and probable result of the war in South Africa when our letters and papers at last began to arrive from England.

The Chinese officials were a *Taotai*, or Governor, who, though he received us civilly enough, never returned our call, only sending his cards with the excuse of press of work, and the *Shwingàm*, or police magistrate, who was a good fellow. He, I believe, really was rather overworked, but found time to come and see us pretty often. He asked us to dinner two or three times, and generally did his best to make things pleasant for us; but then, he had been in Shanghai, and knew something of

the Englishman, not regarding him merely as a foreign devil and a nuisance. On one occasion two of our men were assaulted by three Chinese soldiers close to our gate, one of them being rather knocked about. A sally in force resulted in the capture of one soldier, who was carefully tied up pending the arrival of the Shwingàm's myrmidons, to whom we sent word of the occurrence. When the captive began to realise his position he wept bitterly, and tried to purchase his freedom by offering to give the names of his two companions in crime; but he was told that the Shwingàm would attend to that, and so he did, all three of them being satisfactorily licked before supper-time.

Morse was now on his way home, and I decided to go with him as far as Tashkent to see what the country was like, and get some experience of posting in Russia.

We had two sledges, one for ourselves, the other for our kit and one of my own men, who combined the offices of cook and Turki interpreter. These sledges had to be ordered from Khargos on the frontier forty miles away, where is the last regular posting-house.

On January 3rd, 1900, we started on what turned out to be a nineteen days' drive, the distance being about 850 miles. The road runs by Yakent, Vernoie, (Al Martai), Ali-outai, and Chimkent, skirting the

north side of the Tian Shan range, some detached spurs of which it crosses. Owing to the unusually heavy snowfall, we were able to sledge the whole way, which was lucky, as there is no road to speak of, and, by all accounts, a tarantass, the wheeled vehicle in use here, is not at all a comfortable conveyance. What made the journey take so long was a bad *buran*, or wind, and snowstorm. We did not ourselves encounter it, but it had blocked the road near Ali-outai for some days, and in consequence there were more travellers and mails waiting to get on than there were horses to take them. Twice we had to curtail our day's journey somewhat owing to wind. The result of the block on the road was that we had to travel night and day from Ali-outai to Chimkent, as, once started, being caught up by mails meant their going on with the fresh horses and our being left stranded. Very cold work it was. Kuldja has the reputation of being a warm place, but while I was away Phelps registered a temperature of −52° Fahr. one night, so it may be imagined what travelling was like. Other temperatures which he took at this time were as follows:

1900	Fahr.
Jan. 17th	−27°.
,, 18th	−33°.
,, 19th	−36°.
,, 20th	−30°.
,, 21st	− 5° (snowstorm).
,, 22nd	−40°.
Jan. 23rd	−52°.
,, 24th	−42°.
,, 25th	−37°.
,, 26th	−27°.
,, 27th	− 5° (snowstorm).

One particularly cold night the driver, who was rolled up in innumerable sheepskin-coats, and I should think needed them all, kept looking back at us as we reclined huddled up in the sledge; but if one of us moved he appeared satisfied for a time. After a bit it dawned upon me that he feared we might go to sleep and perish in our dreams. The post sledges are wonderfully strong, and indeed must be to stand the bumping in and out of small unbridged streams. As a rule the horses were distinctly good, and the *troika* (team of three horses abreast) made light of their work. This way of harnessing them has one advantage, which is that it can be easily altered to suit narrow places in the track. Sometimes we had two horses in front and one in the shafts, sometimes the other way on, and on one or two occasions all three were in single file, with the driver doing postillion on the leader.

The country is not worth seeing, at least at that time of year, being a succession of flat plains broken in two or three places by the already-mentioned spurs of the hills, called the Alexander Mountains by the Russians. The ascent of these sometimes took five horses to a sledge to manage, while the descent was accomplished at a furious gallop, usually on one runner of the sleigh, while the occupants were busy looking out for a soft spot to fall on in case of the expected upset.

In Tashkent we stayed ten days, putting up at a

fairly good hotel, called the "Numero Thumentso." The town is a good one, and there are shops of all sorts, but not much in the way of sights to interest a traveller.

Morse now took the train for Batoum, and I started on my return journey to Kuldja. I had bought two sledges so as to avoid the trouble of shifting all my belongings at each stage, the post conveyances being only used on the stage they belong to. I did the journey in fourteen days, in spite of delay occasioned by another *buran;* but to do it in such a short time involved a lot of night work, and it was colder than ever; there was no possibility of keeping warm, the question being to keep alive. Between Chimkent and Ali-outai there had been a great storm, and the road was awful. Sometimes we stuck in drifts, when the united efforts of both teams were required to extricate the sledges one at a time, and on one occasion my sledge got upset in the dry bed of a stream, and gave us much trouble to haul it out. The traffic had been completely blocked for a time, and all the post-houses were full of travellers, many of them frost-bitten; so my progress on this part of the road was very slow, only two or three stages a day, and that chiefly by dint of hiring private horses when the post-horses were all engaged. One thing is certainly well done, and that, as I have already said, is the horsing. There might be

more of them, but what there are are pretty good. On my way back I noticed that nearly all the people in charge of the post-houses were new, and was told that they and their horses had come in in place of the first lot of men, whose animals were by now thin and slow. But the above is the only bright spot in the picture. To anyone accustomed to Indian tonga travelling the delay in changing horses is most annoying; half an hour is quick time for this, an hour and a half being more usual, during which the traveller curses and the men in charge keep on saying "Immediately," the word used being *Sechâs*, which one soon learns to hate the sound of. Other favourite expressions are *Da-da*—"Never mind"; *Nitchivo*—"It doesn't matter"; and the Turki word *Bulmaidu*—"It is impossible" or "I cannot"—all in far too frequent use to please the more energetic Anglo-Saxon. On the way down Morse used to spend much of his time inventing new and choice Americanisms applicable to the country and people in general, which fortunately were not understood. Food on the road is a great trouble. Having my own man, I was fairly well off in this respect; but let others take warning and lay in plenty of stores. There is nothing much but bread and occasionally soup to be got at most of the post-houses, few of them running to an abomination called a "cutlet," a horror which is composed of meat and bone chopped up together

and cooked in grease, a byword with Russian travellers. Another nuisance is that though the fire is supposed to be included in the contract, this rule is in many places a dead letter, and it is no great pleasure to sit and freeze in a room when one expects to be warmed up again. Of course the stove is lit if asked for, but it takes a long time to get hot.

When I was still three days from Kuldja the weather suddenly turned quite warm, and I began to doubt if it would be possible to get the sledges there at all; but they just did it, and I arrived on February 14th, a pleasant sunny day, which gave promise of an early spring and encouraged the rooks to begin building operations in some trees near our house. We ourselves began to make arrangements for leaving our winter quarters; but unfortunately, the warm spell was delusive, more snow was yet to fall, and even on March 13th the thermometer managed to go down to zero.

Round about Kuldja are a lot of warm springs and streams which never freeze. These were frequented by a good many duck which had elected to spend the winter there, instead of migrating southwards, and Phelps had found his chief occupation shooting them, but said that it palled upon him somewhat after a time.

We had quite an excitement on March 14th.

M. Bonnin, a distinguished French traveller and archæologist, arrived, having come right across China. His account of the Sairam Nor Road, by which we intended to leave, was not at all encouraging for us with our large caravan, and so we decided to remain inactive for yet a few more days. M. Bonnin was staying at the Mission, and on his arrival of course sent his card to the Taotai, who, however, had not the good manners even to send his own in return—a breach of etiquette which in China is tantamount to an insult. Naturally M. Bonnin was greatly incensed, and promptly appealed to the Russian Consul as being the head of the European community in Kuldja. The result was that the Taotai had to come and call in person at the Mission. As the Chinese authorities hate Missions, this was indeed a come-down for his dignity, and must have mortified him considerably.

About this time we began to hear rumours of the Chinese Emperor's death; and Messrs. Steinman and Smidt were very anxious about their colleagues in inner China, saying the country was in a very disturbed state, and the people in many places only too ready to break out if there was an opportunity. These forebodings have since come true in a terrible manner.

CHAPTER XI.

KULDJA TO URUMTSI

Marches.		
1.	Kuldja to Swidong	24 miles.
2.	Swidong to Lutsakou	15 „
3.	Lutsakou to Atai	22 „
4.	Atai to Sintai	20 „
5.	Sintai to Setai	20 „
6.	Setai to Utai	25 „
7.	Utai to Takkiyongsa	9 „
8.	Takkiyongsa to Yninghiho	21 „
9.	Yninghiho to Djinko	12 „
10.	Djinko to Shahtungza	14 „
11.	Shahtungza to Toutou	25 „
12.	Toutou to Kultou	20 „
13.	Kultou to Sukafou	18 „
14.	Sukafou to Sikho	19 „
15.	Sikho to Ketang	13 „
16.	Ketang to Yengsihei	23 „
17.	Yengsihei to Pulnahassou	25 „
18.	Pulnahassou to Manas	20 „
19.	Manas to Tungalou	25 „
20.	Tungalou to Hutapi	15 „
21.	Hutapi to Chungki	23 „
22.	Chungki to Urumtsi	24 „
	Total	432 „

It had been our intention to go on to the Altai for *Ovis ammon*, by way of Tchugutchak and across

the Black Irtish valley, returning *viâ* Kobdo and Urumtsi; but in the end we had to give up the idea. The exceptionally long and severe winter prevented our leaving Kuldja in time, and also so much increased the difficulty of getting fodder on the way, that the only possible road was the main one, by which we had meant to return. As we considered that this would be altogether too long a job, we reluctantly gave up the *Ovis ammon*.

We heard from various sources that there were big sheep to be found near Urumtsi, and decided to go there to look for them, having, in fact, a faint hope that the true *O. ammon* might occur even as far west as this. The sheep are there all right, but are very scarce, and we had no luck with them; indeed, from this on we got no sport to speak of. We saw a great deal of country which I believe is quite new to English sportsmen, and which I should most strongly recommend them to avoid. It may be interesting from a scientific point of view, but from a shooting one it is certainly not so; none the less, I may as well give some description of the road and of the sport which may possibly be obtained.

To begin with, it is not at all a pleasant country to travel in. With the exception of a few Kalmaks along the edge of the hills, the inhabitants are nearly all Tungans (Chinese Mahommedans), and ordinary Chinese; they are unpleasant enough separate, but the two together would spoil paradise

itself, and they both treat the "foreign devil" with as much insolence as they think it safe to show. The whole history of the country is one tale of rebellion and massacre—at least, since the great rebellion which lasted from 1850 to 1878. The Tungans then got the upper hand at first, and killed all the Chinese, but in the end a Chinese army of extermination arrived (1878–9) and left hardly anyone alive. Very few Chinese have ventured to settle there since, however, and there were very few Tungans left, so nearly all the land has gone out of cultivation, and only ruined villages and homesteads remain as evidence that a numerous population once existed there.

Another reason why the Chinese will not settle here is one that I have already mentioned as applying to Kuldja, *i.e.* that they fear that Russia will shortly take the country, and they prefer to live under their own Government. From what I have seen of the two rules this is not at all to be wondered at; failing a Government of their own, even the Turki-Mahommedan races prefer China to Russia as master.

The Tungans still put in a good deal of their spare time plotting against the Chinese, and, in the opinion of the Chinese officials at least, the country is far from safe. They always insisted on our having an armed escort of eight soldiers. The said officials themselves of course hate the sight

of one, but they are afraid of any responsibility, and dare not disregard passports. As a precaution in case of trouble, they are usually very careful to explain to one exactly how far their particular district extends, as if anything happens beyond the boundary it is not their affair. As far as being of any use in an emergency goes, I should think that the escort might as well not be there; but they make a fine show with banners and horns, and they were of some use to us on one occasion, though even then they arrived on the scene rather late.

From Kuldja to Urumtsi is 22 marches—432 miles, and I may as well say at once that I do not profess to spell the names of the places properly. I don't know whether it is possible to express Chinese sounds in English; certainly I can't do it myself, so have just put down the nearest approach that I could get.

On March 26th we sent off nearly all our baggage, and started ourselves the next day; the Shwingàm came down in the morning to see us off, and seemed to be really sorry we were going. By now the snow was nearly all gone, but there was enough mud and water to make up for it. However, we were glad to be on the road again, having had more than enough of Kuldja. We put up in a small house outside the city of Swidong, and proceeded to try and smoke ourselves out of it by lighting a fire. Some two

miles away between this and the river Ili is the Chang Jung's own private town. He is a sort of viceroy of the country, and I believe a blood relation of the Emperor; but as we did not want to see him, and did not suppose that he wanted to see us, we made no attempt to get an audience. Though inaccessible to the missionaries, he would probably have received us. Morse went to see him in the summer, and was given a feast of a length proportionate to the great man's dignity, from the quantity and quality of which it took him days to recover.

Lutsakou is a small and dirty place. Among the luxuries of the serai, or rest-house, was the body of a long-defunct camel in the courtyard, but luckily the weather was not yet warm enough for it to be actively offensive.

There is a branch of the Kuldja mission in a small town near, so on our way we went to see Mr. Hoyos, the missionary in charge; he told us that the local official was much exercised over our coming, and he had had some difficulty in persuading him that as far as we were concerned the place was safe.

We had some camels with us, and very bad ones they were too, while the muddy state of the road did not assist them to travel fast; so we could not make Atai, which is the proper stage from Lutsakou, and stopped about half-way, just at the entrance to the

hills. There were a few Kazaks camped here, and we had one of their tents for the night; but our rest was somewhat disturbed by the constant attempts of their sheep to come in. One of our hosts had shot a roe deer that morning; the horn was already full grown and hard, but still covered with velvet which was almost as long as rabbit's fur.

A good deal of trade comes from China by this road, and here we met a caravan of 250 camels with tea. As they always march in single file, this lot covered a good deal of country; we passed many more afterwards, but this was the biggest caravan we saw.

Next day we entered the hills, and soon reached pine-tree level. The road runs up a narrow valley and continually crosses the stream from side to side. There was still a good deal of snow, though, as the path was trodden hard, it was fairly good going. A little later in the year, when the snow in the upper valleys begins really to melt, the road is often impassable for days at a time, as the stream then becomes a raging torrent, and most of the bridges are washed away.

Near Atai there are said to be both ibex and bear. Probably there are, but I doubt the latter being plentiful, as their skins have a commercial value. Only one thing prevents their total extinction, and that is their indisposition to submit without resistance. A man here told us a moving story

about a friend of his who went in pursuit of a she-bear and her cub, with the result that when he wounded the cub the irate parent turned upon him and tore him to pieces. Our informant did not seem much grieved at the fate of his friend, but was much disgusted by the unladylike conduct of the bear.

From Atai the road begins to ascend more sharply, and, finally crossing a ridge, descends to the shore of Lake Sairam, which was still frozen completely over, though the ice was no longer safe to ride across, as it was beginning to split in places. Here there is a small Chinese fort, the garrison of which must have a really cheerful time during the winter, as the Sairam Nor has a very evil reputation for cold and wind. Sintai is a small place at the east end of the lake in a comparatively sheltered situation. There is a small island near with an old building on it, probably a temple of some sort. The water of the lake is fresh, or very nearly so.

The Barotala Lake is north-east of this, said to be distant about fifty miles. We had heard before of a big sheep there, species, of course, unknown, also that the ibex there were very big indeed. I have no doubt that the sheep exist; but if, as we were told, the ibex are bigger than the Akjas ones, they must be very fine. However, it may be so; the Akjas ones were a complete revelation to us after our Himalayan experiences.

After leaving the Sairam Nor basin there is a gradual descent all the way to Utai, the country being gravel and rock, barren, and nearly waterless, a marked contrast to the Ili side of the range. The snow was all gone except in one or two sheltered places, and the rainfall is probably small. There are a lot of gazelle about, but the ground is so absolutely open that it is almost impossible to get anywhere near them, the few scattered salt bushes giving insufficient cover for stalking, and I should think there is no danger of their extinction, in spite of the breechloading rifles; in fact, they seem to be even in advance of the times, and to have an exaggerated idea of the capabilities of the modern small bore, if one may judge from their extreme shyness. In Turki they are called jeron; in Chinese, *hwang yang*, or yellow sheep. They seem to be a near relation of *Gazella subgutturosa*, but are much more yellow, and have white faces. They are found all along the range on the plain at the foot of the hills.

There is no mistake about the wind in this part of the world; it *can* blow, and by all accounts very frequently does so. The night we were at Utai we pitched our tents, as the serai was even dirtier than usual. The wind began to rise in the evening, so as a precautionary measure we got our small tents ready and weighted them down heavily with stones. About seven o'clock the real storm (locally called

buran) arrived, when, after a short but gallant struggle, my big tent collapsed with a broken pole, and I feared the small one would follow suit. The air was filled with sand, grit, and even small stones, while it was as much as one could do to stand. Luckily, it was all over before morning, but was sufficiently unpleasant while it lasted.

Between Utai and Takkiyongsa there is a small bazaar and a picturesque temple in a grove of trees, which were loaded with rooks' nests. Trees here are few and far between, so the rooks have to make the most of what there are, and seem pretty crowded, while some of the nests are so low down as to be almost within reach.

Yninghiho is a very small village in scrubby jungle. I went out on a long and, as it proved, vain hunt for hwang yang, but only saw a wolf, which I missed. To my surprise and disgust there were a few mosquitoes already about, bloodthirsty as usual.

On April 5th we reached Djinko, a considerable place, where there is an amban. The weather had a relapse, and it froze sharply at night. There is a short road across the hills from Kuldja to Djinko; it reduces the distance very much, but is only practicable in summer, and is chiefly used by salt-carriers on their way to Kuldja.

Shortly after leaving Djinko the road crosses a small spur of hills, and emerges on to a sandy salt-

impregnated plain. Away to the north we saw a big lake, which appeared to be still frozen over. Shahtungza consists of a tumble-down serai near the only fresh water for miles, and that can only be called fresh by courtesy. It blew another gale here, and the sand was enough to smother one. Tents were out of the question, and we passed the night in a small room without doors or windows; so, as far as the sand was concerned, we might almost as well have been outside. Dinner was a sketchy and very gritty performance—on the whole, one of the not uncommon experiences of travel which are more pleasant to look back upon than at the time.

Four or five miles from Toutou, which consists of a serai and the usual small Chinese fort, the country becomes swamp and forest. I saw some deer tracks near this. From the nature of the country the animal must, I think, be the Yarkand stag. The people said that there were a good lot of them about, also pig and an occasional tiger.

More woods and swamps to Kultou, which is on the bank of what must in summer be a considerable river, but when we crossed it it was dry. Snow fell during the night here, which made the road very greasy next day when we went on to Sukafou, a very dirty little village, chiefly inhabited by Tungans, where the mud reminded us of Kuldja during a thaw.

About two miles from here there lives a Kalmak chief, so the next day, the 10th, we moved out and camped close to his palace, a very good house, and really almost worthy of the former appellation. There was also a big Buddhist temple close by. The chief was a young fellow of about twenty, and when he discovered that we came from the Indian side, he was most civil and obliging, sending at once for shikaris to assist us. He told us he was shortly going to Lhasa on a pilgrimage, and asked us many questions about Thibet. Oddly enough, he also talked about the Chino-Japanese War, and seemed to be far more intelligent than the average Chinese amban. One of his chief treasures was a stuffed tiger shot near here last autumn. It was not particularly hairy, and no lighter coloured than the Indian ones. As a specimen of the taxidermist's art it could hardly be regarded as a complete success, but afforded its owner much satisfaction as it was pulled about on a small trolly.

The shikaris did not arrive till the 12th, as they had to come some distance, and next morning we started off full of hope, which, alas! was destined to be disappointed.

The ground was about twenty miles away back to the north-west, and was quite low down, being in fact at the very foot of the hills where they merge into the plain, on which there were a few jeron—unapproachable as usual. We saw a few sheep

here, but shot none, so their species remains undecided. The first day we saw an old head of about fifty inches. It was so old and broken that its original thickness was merely a matter for conjecture; but the shikaris said that it was not by any means a big one, and as nothing that we saw in the flesh at all approached it in size, we concluded that we would not assist in the extermination of an animal already scarce enough.

The sheep are darker in colour than *Ovis poli*, while their habits more resemble those of *Ovis ammon* (*hodgsonii*). We put them down as being the same sort as the ones near Jom, but of this of course we cannot be sure.

The shikaris told us that further up in the hills where there are pine trees there are a few wapiti to be found, but by their account not very big ones; further up still there are ibex. The country we were in was very bare, and we were assisted in determining not to stay by the scarcity of water and almost complete absence of grass. We saw a good many sand-grouse about.

We returned to our main camp, and on the 19th, after saying good-bye to the Kalmaks, we started on the road again. After crossing a fair-sized river and some four miles of jungle, there is a sandy plain right up to the town of Sikho, which lies in a depression, and is consequently invisible until one is almost at the gates. It is a fair-sized place, with a

bazaar, fort, and an amban in charge. The road to Tchugutchak branches off here.

Another march over a like class of country took us to Ketang, and here, being up on the roof of the serai in the evening, we saw a lot of animals in the far distance. Through the telescope they appeared to be kulon—a sort of wild donkey (in Ladaki, *kiang*); so we caught a fairly intelligent native, and proceeded to interrogate him on the subject. He said they were kulon, and that there used to be immense numbers of them, but that they had been very heavily shot off in order to save the grazing for domestic animals. He also said that up Tchugutchak way there were wild horses as well—*Equus prejvalsky*, I suppose.

The following day we decided to have a try after these kulon, just to make sure what they were; but as we had a twenty-three miles march to go, we had not much time, and did not succeed in getting one, though I got near enough to be pretty sure of their identity as kulon. It is odd that they should be so plentiful here and nowhere else on the road. We also saw a few jeron, while the down-like country nearer the hills looks as though it ought to hold sheep.

The jungle begins again about three miles from Yengsihei, and lasts to within some twenty miles of Manas, for which twenty miles the country is rather swampy. To the north there are large tracts

of forest, mostly poplar trees, to the south a considerable extent of low, undulating hills between the road and the main range of mountains. The Manas River has to be crossed before getting to the town, but as the water had not yet begun to rise it presented no difficulty.

The population of Manas have a very evil reputation, and judging by our experience, they certainly do their best to live up to it.

To begin with, in the morning as I was riding alone in advance, I met two Chinamen with a loaded mule, which they carefully brought across the road, and then proceeded to try and drive it over me; however, they failed in this attempt, and I promptly hit one of them over the head with my whip—an active way of showing resentment which seemed to vex them much, though as there were no stones about they had to content themselves with throwing Chinese Billingsgate at me, which I hope did them good.

Close to the town Phelps and I were riding together when we met three Chinese soldiers; they were riding on the other side of the road, but came across when they saw us, rode straight at us and cut at us with their whips. This time, however, they had made a mistake, as we returned the compliment with interest, and a smart cavalry skirmish ensued, in the middle of which two of our own men arrived on the scene; one of the enemy managed to escape,

but the other two, one of whom was armed with a formidable sword (which he luckily dropped), were soon on the ground and tied up, their ponies being let go. I was rather glad when our escort arrived, as a crowd of agricultural Chinese, armed with hoes, began to assemble, and I feared a rescue. We handed over our prisoners, somewhat the worse for wear, and they, seeing now how completely they were in the wrong box, began to beg for mercy, saying that they did not know who we were—a truly Chinese excuse for an utterly unprovoked assault, and one to which, needless to say, we paid no attention.

When we arrived at the serai, we found there was yet another complaint to make. We had sent on one of our men with our cards and passports for the amban, and just outside the Yámen (official residence and court) he had been set upon by a mob; he was a good deal knocked about, but being a powerful and determined fellow, had managed to run one of his assailants in. By this time we were greatly pleased with the state of law and order maintained in Manas, and sent a message to the amban to say so, remarking at the same time that we would recommend him to his chief in Urumtsi, and also to the Tsungli Yámen in Pekin. He sent back a message imploring us not to do so, saying that he had only arrived from Kashgar ten days before, and that Manas was not exactly a bed

of roses, or words to that effect. He had the man captured at the Yámen licked, and sent him down to us in charge of the police to show us the result (it appeared to be very satisfactory); he had also caught another of the mob, and promised to attend to him later. A military officer came down to inquire our pleasure with regard to our two, saying that he was quite overwhelmed with shame, and that they ought to be beheaded, etc. We suggested that a little stick would about meet the case, and sent two of our men to see it inflicted; their report certainly freed the officials from any charge of sympathy with the culprits. The punishment was the small bamboo on both legs, for a description of which see Norman's *Far East*. The Chinese soldiery are the scum of the country, a most unmitigated set of blackguards. The only thing in the above incident which surprised me was that they tried it being only three to two. They were indeed braves, for usually they require far better odds than this before getting further than abuse. They are accustomed to bully the natives, *i.e.* Yarkandis, as these do not show fight, and I do not suppose that much would happen if one followed their example; but one's natural impulse is to hit back promptly and chance the consequences, which if they once got one down would be serious, to say the least of it, and I would not hesitate to use fire-arms to avoid it if hard-pressed. The authorities

might possibly report the matter, but would be unlikely to make a fuss at the time.

To Tungalou is twenty-five miles, nearly all through abandoned cultivation. Through a gap in the foot-hills we saw some pine-clad slopes, which looked good ground for wapiti and roe deer, while further back there is a very fine triple peak which towers above the rest, and at a guess I should think must be about 20,000 feet high. About here we passed an immense number of camels laden with wool for Russia; though how it pays to take it so far is more than I can understand, the more so as it is unwashed and half of its weight must be dirt.

The road from here to Urumtsi passes through a lot more old cultivation with strips of desert between. The news of our Manas row had preceded us, in consequence of which the small ambans of Hutapi and Changki were extremely attentive. There is a coal-mine in the hills near Hutapi, but I do not think that it is worked to any great extent. From Chungki a side road turns down to Urumtsi, the main road to China going on by Kitai and Barkul.

We arrived at Urumtsi on April 17th, and put up in the old Russian consulate, a good house but inside the town; the new consulate is some way outside. Urumtsi is on the bank of a river, but in spite of its walls and ditch is hardly to be considered

a formidable fortress, as it is commanded by hills all round.

We were glad to have got over the first stage of our long journey back to India, and a most unpleasant one too. The serais on the road are not nice places, but one is driven into them perforce, there being usually no place to pitch camp. Later on in the year, when the grass has had time to grow up a bit, it is possible to avoid the main road almost entirely by coasting along the hills, and it is not then even necessary to go into Urumtsi, as there is a byway from near Manas to Taksan.

We stayed three days at Urumtsi, during which we exchanged calls with the Russian Consul-General and the amban. The latter had formerly been in Kashgar, and appeared to be rather a good sort for a Chinaman. I may here mention that the maps we had with us arrived near Urumtsi at a pitch of geographical inaccuracy which was quite bewildering. Better ones may possibly be obtainable in St. Petersburg, as I believe that a good deal of this country has been surveyed by Russians.

Somewhere to the north-east of Urumtsi the saiga (*Saiga tatarica*) is found; at least, we saw a pair of horns in the bazaar which had the piece of still fresh skin attached to them, and were told that they came from somewhere up that way. They are said to have a medicinal value,—in China.

CHAPTER XII.

URUMTSI TO KUCHA

On May 1st, 1900, we started again in quest of the sheep, and did some twenty-seven miles to Sansing or Tsin-lung-kung. Most places about here have three names, Chinese, Turki, and Kalmak, which is apt to be a little confusing. This place is a bit north-east of the main Turfan road, and the way to it is across a monotonous gravel plain, where there are a few hwang yang, wilder even than usual. Here we had to wait a day, as some camels which were carrying grain for us did not get in. We got two local shikaris, who seemed fairly knowledgable —one a Kalmak, the other an old gentleman of unknown race, who was quite bald, so his hair afforded no clue, and I forgot to ask him. On the 3rd we went on up the Ta-song-kou valley, a pretty park-like country, grassy, and dotted with pine trees, where marmots simply swarmed and whistled at us in their customary manner. We only did about ten miles, and camped on the edge of some grass-covered downs. In the afternoon there was a thunderstorm and a heavy downpour of rain.

The following morning we crossed the downs, the grass on which had been closely fed off by the natives' herds, and entered a very narrow valley, shut in by high cliffs on both sides; after a bit it opened out a little, and we left the Karashar little road, which we were on up till now, turning more westwards, the distance covered being about ten miles again. Near our camp we found some old horns of wild sheep, but none big. From here we crossed a low ridge, and entered a much more barren country, there being no more pine trees, though it is not above their level. Turning west again, we crossed another low ridge, and descended into a deep valley, some ten miles again, pitching camp by what might almost be called a small river, about which there was some of last year's grass still left. The little road from Manas which I have already mentioned runs past this, and here in days gone by they used to mine for gold. We saw some old shafts, but they are now all falling in. Sad to relate, this district was also a failure, this first camp being the only one from which we saw any rams at all. We both saw some one day, but neither of us got a shot, and anyway I don't think my lot were big.

There were a few heads about, and judging from them, these sheep seem to run to about fifty inches in length and sixteen round the base. The front angle of the horn is well defined, the thickness

extends lower down the horn than in *Ovis poli*, and the horns turn closer in to the head. The highest ground is only about top pine level, say 9,000 feet at most, while we once or twice saw ewes much lower down. I suppose they must be near relations of the Jom and Sukafou ones, and probably exist at intervals in the foot-hills all along the range; I am somewhat inclined to believe that further east along the range these comparatively low ground sheep approach nearer and nearer to the *ammon* type, until the Altai Hills and the true *O. ammon* are reached; but they are so scarce and hard to find that this theory would be apt to take a long time to work out.

We had four different camps about here, and scoured the country far and wide, but could find nothing; our shikaris certainly knew the country well, but were completely beaten. One reason, no doubt, for this was that a lot of new Kazaks had immigrated, and the whole place was fouled by their herds; also there were wolves about, which did not mend matters. Goodness knows where the sheep had been driven to; there can never have been many at the best of times, and we were much handicapped in our movements by want of grass, owing to the severe winter and backward season. There were a few ibex about, but we saw no big ones. The weather was particularly vile; it blew hard the whole time, with occasional rain, and

attempts at snow, and at last culminated in a gale and snowstorm. This finally disgusted us, and we decided to leave, much to the delight of some unhappy Chinese soldiers who had been ordered to follow our fortunes and guard our camp; we had vainly tried to send them back, but they were afraid to go until they could take back news that we had left their amban's district.

Our last shooting-camp was on the edge of the already mentioned barren plain, and close to the little road to Karashar; but as this little road crosses a high spur of the hills it was still blocked by snow, and impassable for a caravan, according to the account of two Kalmaks who had come over it with unloaded ponies, so we had to go round by Taksan.

To Taksan was about sixty miles, and it took us four days to do it, as there are only certain places where there is grass and water—a gradual descent the whole way, and it soon began to get unpleasantly hot, while after the first march, where there were a few scrubby plants, the country got more and more barren, until at last there was no vegetation of any sort or kind except on the edge of a stream, which we followed part of the way; all the rest was nothing but a dreary expanse of gravel plains, broken here and there by low, rocky hills. But if the way seemed long the wind was certainly not cold; it might have come straight out of Tophet,

and there was always enough and to spare of it. The last day was the worst, as we then left the stream with its fringe of willows, and travelled through desolation till Taksan was reached. This is now quite a small place, though it still boasts a bazaar of a kind. The inhabitants are mostly Tungans, and, I suppose, were heavily thinned after the revolt, as the immense amount of old cultivation about shows that there was once a numerous population. The water supply is brought underground by a system of wells and tunnels, and when it comes to the surface is infested with small brown snakes, which, however, appear to be harmless.

We were now on the main Turfan-Aksu road, and, to our surprise, found twenty-five baggage animals waiting to carry supplies for us. The Urumtsi amban had informed the Turfan one of our coming, and the latter had sent us this very welcome reinforcement. Being greatly struck by this attention, we sought an explanation of it, and found that the Turfan amban has this part of the road in his charge, and is supposed to attend to the possible purchase of supplies, such as grass and grain, by travellers. This he naturally neglects to do, and had sent the animals so that we should have no cause for complaint. The pack-saddles here were of a kind which we had not seen before, consisting of a saddle and an outer wooden frame, which could be lifted off. The loads were

attached to this frame, and never untied from it unless wanted, and the contrivance saved a lot of time, as, after the saddle was on, the frame and load were put on the top, and there were no more ropes or girths to be attended to.

TAKSAN TO KORLA

Marches.	
1. Taksan to Su-bashi . . .	12 miles.
2. Su-bashi to Akbulak . . .	12 ,,
3. Akbulak to Kamish . . .	30 ,,
4. Kamish to Kara Kizil . . .	19 ,,
5. Kara Kizil to Ushak Kul . .	27 ,,
6. Ushak Kul to Tah-wul-gai . .	21 ,,
7. Tah-wul-gai to Karashahr . .	22 ,,
8. Karashahr to —— . . .	17 ,,
9. —— to Korla . . .	19 ,,
Total	179 ,,

From Taksan a twelve-mile march across the plain took us to Su-bashi, a serai just at the foot of a range of hills (*Su* means water, here represented by a small well); and another twelve miles took us to Akbulak, also consisting of a well and a serai. This last twelve miles was up a very narrow gorge shut in by most tremendous cliffs. Here the wind fairly surpassed itself, carrying such clouds of dust that it became as dark as London in a bad November fog; but this and the shut-in nature of the place made it quite cold, which was some compensation for the misery of the all-pervading grit.

Khamish is thirty miles on, and long miles at that, the first ten or so still uphill, the valley becoming more open as the top of the range is approached. The descent is gradual, and the plain at the bottom, with the halting-place still out of sight, a picture of desolation. The name of Khamish must have been bestowed in irony, as the reeds so called are conspicuous by their absence ; but there are two or three fields and a few willow trees, some of which had been blown down by the previous day's gale.

Another weary plain and so to Kara Kizil, a serai and well three or four miles into another range of hills. Kara Kizil signifies black-red, which is rather meaningless, and we thought of a lot more names for it before we left. Its chief attraction was an unlimited supply of vicious mosquitoes, though, as there is no water for miles, their origin is a mystery, unless they are blown up from Lake Bagrash, a journey the length of which may account for their exceeding thirst. Next day swarms of gad-flies also helped to make the journey unpleasant. Leaving Kara Kizil before daylight in the morning, we soon reached the top of the valley, and saw before us an apparently unending vista of gently sloping plain, dotted with a few struggling bushes and with the usual bare hills on both sides—those on the south being quite low, probably the last stragglers towards the great central plain. Half-

way there is a serai and well. We were told that the said well was 250 feet deep, and it certainly looked it, but, in spite of its depth, it was nearly dry, and often fails entirely. The man in charge then goes to the hills for snow, which must have a considerable pecuniary value by the time he gets back with it. At last Ushak Kul came in sight; the little lake from which it takes its name has ceased to exist, or, at all events, has become so small as to be imperceptible; but there were green fields and trees and a stream of clear water most refreshing to behold. Poor Gujad, the dog, died to-day, I suppose from heat, though he was travelling in a cart.

Next day, after crossing a small stretch of desert, we passed two or three hamlets and then got into jungle. Tah-wul-gai is a small village surrounded by forest and swamp. There was a fair breeze when we were there, but even with that the mosquitoes were bad enough, and the people said that in still weather they were terrible. How the natives endure them at all I don't know. These insects formed one great topic of conversation for ourselves and our men. On arriving at a place the first question asked was usually, "Are they bad here?" In most cases the answer was in the affirmative, and was fully borne out by our experience. The Turki word for mosquito is *pacha*, and may possibly be taken to mean that they are big people, from

whose orders there is no escape, as many Eastern names and titles are bestowed in this jesting spirit.

On May 30th we reached Karashahr, going by a rather swampy short cut close to what must be an offshoot of Lake Bagrash, where we saw a good many ducks. From this on there are pheasants in more or less abundance wherever there is jungle to hold them. The Tekkes pheasants have a white neck-ring, but those on the Yarkand side have not. We camped outside the town of Karashahr, and did not go into it at all, merely exchanging cards and gifts with the amban. It has the reputation of being the dirtiest city in Asia, and lives up to it from the account our messenger gave us; for the rest it is an uninteresting-looking place on a flat plain with hardly any trees. The inhabitants are mostly Tungans and Kalmaks, neither of them remarkable for cleanliness, while the latter have a most unpleasant custom in that they do not bury their dead, but throw them out for the dogs and crows. This may be all right where there is only a scattered nomad population, but does not seem at all conducive to the healthiness of a city.

We made no stay here, but left the next morning, crossing the river which drains the Yulduz valley by a ferry close to the town, and stopping that night near a small serai where there was a malodorous swamp and a well of brackish water. The following

day we made Korla, half-way to which the plain comes to an end. The road meets the river, which is the outflow from Lake Bagrash, and the two run through a valley which forms a curious gap in the hill-range separating Korla from Karashahr. Near the entrance to this valley we saw some slag in the road and some old pit-mouths close by. We were told that there used to be both copper and coal-mines here, but that the former are now no longer worked at all, and the latter very little.

The river is rapid and broken, the water beautifully clear and full of fish. All the mud must settle down in the lake, as the river near Karashahr is dirty enough, as are most snow-fed streams at this season.

Korla is not a big city, but there is a great extent of cultivation round it and any quantity of trees; in fact, it is the best-timbered place that I have seen in Central Asia.

Very glad we were to leave the Tungans and Chinese behind and again reach a real Mussulman country, where the people are Yarkandis, or at least of the same race, where they do make some attempt at keeping their villages clean, and where the entire population does not assemble to stare, point, and make remarks as though one were a gratuitous raree show. Theoretically, I suppose, one ought to get used to this in course of time, but in practice the case is quite the reverse.

Here we stopped a day—a welcome rest—and camped under some fine old trees round a mazar (saint's tomb) well away from the town. One of these trees was a very fine acacia; it was 25 feet in circumference three feet from the ground, and the people said that it was a survivor of the jungle which grew there before Korla existed, which should make its age out to be pretty considerable. I bought a saddle pony here from a Kalmak for thirty-nine seers (Rs. 78), rather a high price, but as he turned out a good one he was worth it.

KORLA TO KUCHA

Marches.		
1. Korla to Shanko	9	miles.
2. Shanko to Chachi	30	„
3. Chachi to Mashai	20	„
4. Mashai to Yangi Shahr	25	„
5. Yangi Shahr to Burgu	20	„
6. Burgu to Arbat	23	„
7. Arbat to Yakka	28	„
8. Yakka to Kucha	18	„
Total	173	„

We hired two carts from Korla to Kucha at the not excessive rate of eight seers each. They each had two horses, and between them took nearly all our belongings; so that we were able to give our jaded baggage-ponies a rest, for the heat and incessant marching were beginning to tell upon them. We also took to making early starts, on one or two

occasions getting up before midnight, and trying to make up for want of sleep after the march was over.

On June 3rd we were off again in a gale of wind, and went to Shanko, which in this direction is the end of the Korla oasis. The following morning, or to be quite exact, late that night, we started for Chachi — thirty miles of gravel and sand scattered over with a few bushes. There are two small wells on the way, but they are very small indeed, and not very certain, and after giving the dogs one bucketful of water, we had to wait a long time before we could get another for our ponies. Chachi is not much of a village, but there are some fine willow trees there, under which we found a pleasant, shady place for our camp.

From here to Mashai, and thence to Yangi Shahr, the road is nearly all through jungle, though on the first of these two marches there is only water in one place—a well with a distinct flavour of sulphur about it; the second march is much better in this respect, and there is a fair-sized village and serai rather less than half-way. In the jungle to the south of Mashai the Yarkand stag is said to be plentiful.

The result of the system of irrigation followed in these parts is not unfrequently disastrous; for the whole of the water-supply being used up for the fields, the jungle below them dies out, and the

natural barrier against the desert being thus removed, the sand soon encroaches on the cultivation, which is sometimes entirely overwhelmed, so that the villages cease to exist. Then the stream gets another chance, and gradually pushes out again, when the jungle may in course of time again grow on its banks ; but this process of recuperation must take a very long time.

Yangi Shahr is a good-sized place, with a bazaar and a Beg to keep things in order. He came to pay his respects to us, and expressed the usual hope that we had had a pleasant journey. The Karashahr amban had sent two of his men with us, and very useful they were, as they used to go on in front to find a camping-place, and generally get things straight.

Burgu is another big place, nearly as big as Korla ; the road to it is over a plain mostly covered with tamarisk and khamish, but near Burgu very strongly impregnated with salt, and consequently barren. From Burgu the first half of the march is through a pleasant populated country, after which desert again supervenes till Arbat comes in view—a small green patch which, owing to the lie of the ground, is visible from a most exasperating distance. After that, desert again, which, broken only by one house, a few trees, and a field or two about half-way, lasts to Yakka—a fair-sized place with a bazaar.

On June 10th, after a march the last half of

which is over another stony waste, we arrived at Kucha, and camped in a pleasant orchard in the outskirts of the town.

Here we remained seven days, giving both ponies and men a necessary rest after such hard marching. It was still a far cry to Ladak, and though we were anxious to get on as fast as possible, it would not do to march the animals to death.

For the first two days or so it was rather pleasant having nothing to do, and we luxuriated in idleness, but after that it began to get irksome. One blessing was that for some reason or other there were no mosquitoes in our orchard. The fruit was not ripe yet, with the exception of mulberries, which we had got for some days past, the apricots being still too green to venture on; but we got a fair supply of vegetables.

There is of course an amban here, the place being a big one, probably nearly as big as Kashgar, but we did not make his acquaintance. We sent up our passports and cards, and three begs came to see us; but as the great man had not the good manners to send his card in return, we saw no reason for calling on him.

The road by which we came from Korla is the main one, and runs close under the hills the whole way; but the weather was so hazy with dust that we never saw more than the first range of foot-hills, and not always even that.

Wild sheep, I suppose of the Jom variety, certainly inhabit these hills in places, as two or three times we saw their heads, as well as some fine specimens of domestic sheep horns, ornamenting mazars by the roadside, and the people certainly would not take the trouble to bring them far; also we twice saw gazelle from the road, but they were too far off to be quite sure about. I thought that they were the Yarkand variety, not hwang yang.

From here to Aksu is only eight days' journey, so we were really close to the Tekkes again; in fact, in clear weather one could probably see the main dividing range from here, and we wished we had known what the Urumtsi country was like, as instead of marching all that weary distance, we might have done a month or two's ibex-shooting about Akjas, and then have returned the way we came. However, it was no use thinking of that now, somebody has to go first; but we arrived at the conclusion that pioneering new shooting-grounds does not always pay.

CHAPTER XIII.

KUCHA TO KHOTAN

Marches.		
1.	Kucha to ——	16 miles.
2.	—— to Yakchumba	6 ,,
3.	Yakchumba to ——	15 ,,
4.	—— to ——	23 ,,
5.	—— to ——	10 ,,
6.	—— to ——	16 ,,
7.	—— to ——	20 ,,
8.	—— to Tarim ferry	26 ,,
	Tarim ferry to across river	
9.	Across river to on Khotan River	17 ,,
10.	—— to Zil	17 ,,
11.	Zil to ——	20 ,,
12.	—— to Yangi Daria	16 ,,
13.	Yangi Daria to ——	26 ,,
14.	—— to Baidalik	25 ,,
15.	Baidalik to ——	15 ,,
16.	—— to ——	16 ,,
17.	—— to pass Baksem	22 ,,
18.	—— to ——	20 ,,
19.	—— to Akbash	21 ,,
20.	Akbash to Koshlash	22 ,,
21.	Koshlash to ——	16 ,,
22.	—— to Islamabad	22 ,,
23.	Islamabad to ——	27 ,,
24.	—— to village	20 ,,
25.	Village to Khotan	10 ,,
	Total	464 ,,

Three of our ponies were so travel-worn that we left them here in Kucha, giving them away as presents, the recipients of which I dare say agreed with Mr. Jorrocks in "confounding all presents what eats."

We now decided to do all our marching at night, as the heat during the day took it out of our baggage animals very much.

On the evening of June 18th we started, and after doing sixteen miles, mostly through cultivation, but one piece of desert, we camped in an orchard at about 12 o'clock for the rest of the night. Next afternoon we crossed the Muzart River by ferry, and arrived at Yakchumba, where there is a bazaar, and where we stopped to get barley for the road. The only grain procurable in any quantity in Kucha is Indian corn, on which the ponies do not do so well; we wanted about forty maunds (one maund = 80 lbs.), and had hired donkeys to carry it. Having been ordered in advance, the barley ought to have been ready for us, but of course it wasn't; however, we got it during the next day, and in the evening did another march to the last house, well out in a sea of tamarisk-covered plain, which stretched away in front, and was to all appearance without limit.

On the evening of the 21st, after spending a very hot day in the tents, we did twenty-three miles to the next water—a brackish pool in an old

watercourse. It was a very dark night, and the guides managed to lose their way once, but luckily soon found the path again. Near our camp there were a few trees, and a considerable extent of abandoned cultivation, the only inhabitants now being a few wandering shepherds. We were told that some thirty years ago the water changed its course, leaving the old channel dry, whereupon, of course, all cultivation ceased, but no one seemed to know the reason of the change, and it had not occurred to anyone to go up stream and find out.

The next two days, or rather evenings, we only did ten and sixteen miles, having to camp in certain places for grass and water. We were now following the old channel, certain holes in which provided us with plenty of water; but it was both salt and dirty, so that, in spite of the heat, there was no temptation to drink much of it, even in the form of tea. Here we met a local shikari who was in the employ of the Aksu amban, and had been sent out to try and get a stag; he said there were not many about, and had so far been unsuccessful, but there was plenty of time left to get one before their horns got too hard.

On the 24th we began to get among trees; but they are having a hard fight with the sand, and about here appear to be getting the worst of it. Up till now we had been heading nearly due west, but

this day began to turn more in a southerly direction, the last three miles of the twenty accomplished being nearly due south, and along another water-course, which at this time of the year should have been filled from the Tarim River; but the summer flood was late, and it was nearly dry, though the pool we camped by was fresh and clean—at least, in comparison with the stuff we had lately had to drink.

During the next evening and night a long march of twenty-six miles to the south, with a slight easterly tendency at times, took us to the banks of the Tarim River, where we arrived at dawn, and pitched camp by the ferry. We passed a big swamp or lake away to the west of our line of march. I had started rather early, and ridden on in front, doing ten miles or so before it got too dark to see.

On the 26th we were favoured with a *buran*, or sandstorm, which greatly delayed our passage of the river; in fact, at one time it blew so hard that the ferry-boat could not be got across at all. The boat was a small one, only taking four ponies at a time, and as the crossing was more than 200 yards wide, it took us till late in the evening to get everything over. Luckily the river was still low; if it had been at its full summer width, it would probably have taken us most of another day as well.

Next day, after seventeen miles we reached and

crossed the bed of the Khotan River, dry, except for occasional little pools under the banks, by one of which we camped about three miles above the junction with the Tarim.

The bed of the Khotan River is here only about 500 yards across, and when in flood the water is said to be six feet deep ; but further up it widens out, and the bed is anything from half a mile to three or more miles in width. The river meanders along this crossing from side to side, often splitting in several channels and generally behaving in an undecided manner. From our camp here we saw the hills by Aksu, appearing much nearer than they really are, also a very fine black sandstorm, which occasioned us some anxiety, but luckily it passed away to the north.

On the 28th we reached Zil, another seventeen miles, but the going was very bad, the sand in the river-bed being both loose and deep. There is a path along the banks as well, but here the river way is the most direct.

Zil is only a camping-ground, and is where the Aksu road joins the Khotan River. There is a plentiful and permanent supply of water in a pool in the jungle, but the quality is indifferent.

The banks of the river are covered with a belt of poplar trees, which look green and pleasant enough, but the soil under them is all sand, and in places the desert has pressed right up to the river

bank, while I do not suppose that the forest belt can be anywhere more than a few miles wide.

On the 29th we met the water coming down, so from this out our road was partly through the jungle and partly along the edge of the channel, where the going was now hard and good, the sand in most places being wet.

The river is said always to come down in three floods, the third and last of which is the principal one, and reaches the Tarim. The one we met was the second, which was rather later than usual; but as far as grass, water, and a good road are concerned, we probably made the journey at the best time of the summer season. The nights were cool, though during the day the sun was hot, the temperature going up to 106° in a double-roofed tent.

On the 30th we reached Yangi Daria (the New River), where the stream has taken a shift to the west, leaving a forest-clad island between its present course and the now dry channel on the east. In spite of the name, the change probably occurred many years ago.

Hereabouts the jungle belt must be pretty wide and the country better watered, as I saw eight or ten jeron, as well as lots of their tracks, also those of pig and a few deer; but tigers are said not to come up this way, though there are a few on the banks of the Tarim.

On July 5th we passed Baksem, where the

western desert comes right up to the river, and where Dr. Sven Hedin emerged after his terrible and nearly fatal journey across the Takkla Makhan in 1896. Next day we camped about three miles short of Mazar Tagh, which, though only a low, rocky, and absolutely barren range of hills, was a landmark at last, and showed that we had made some progress. The country is otherwise so monotonous that one feels as though one would never arrive anywhere at all.

Near the foot of the Mazar Tagh is a trophy of Chinese justice in the shape of two human heads. Their history is as follows. Two years ago, as six Khotan merchants were camping by the Tarim River on their way to Aksu, they were attacked by five robbers, determined ones too; for after beginning the affray with guns they completed their work with hatchets, with a due regard for the old saying that dead men tell no tales. The booty they obtained does not appear to have been very great; but such as it was they decided to go on the spree with it, and with this intention went to Khotan, of all places in the world to select. For a few days all went well, but one of the robbers was foolish enough to wear a coat taken from one of the victims, and this the murdered man's wife recognised one day in the bazaar. The game was now up; she went to the authorities and the robbers took to flight, but were all caught, so now two of their

heads adorn the Mazar Tagh, two the Tarim ferry, near which the crime was committed, and one the gate of Khotan.

Akbash was reached during the night of the 7th, and early next morning the river began to rise rapidly, making us feel rather anxious, as the Karakash River had still to be crossed. It brings down more water than the one from Khotan, and we knew that if luck was against us we might have to wait three or four days for a chance to ford it. There was a considerable daily rise and fall in the river, it being always lowest in the early morning and rising again towards nightfall. This phenomenon is, of course, common to all snow-fed streams, but I should not have expected to see it so marked at such a distance from the hills, and there may possibly be some other explanation.

That night we did twenty-two miles to Koshlash, and forded the Karakash River just before dawn. There was no time to spare, as the water was rising, and the ford was full 500 yards across, being more than girth deep in places. Now, at last, the road to Khotan lay clear before us, and the before-mentioned risk of being delayed several days was past and over, at which we rejoiced greatly, as the prospect had not been a lively one, the heat, dust, and mosquitoes being no inducement to linger by the way. The next march we only did sixteen miles, the greater part of the way being over sand-

hills, where the going was very heavy and progress slow. On the 10th we reached Islamabad, a village, though not much of a one; but on this occasion we were glad to reach an inhabited country and houses once more, as, though we usually had a distinct preference in favour of the jungle, by now we were rather tired of it. After leaving Islamabad, we covered two marches of twenty-seven and twenty miles before reaching another village. Part of the way was over more sand-hills, and the whole country is monotonous and ugly—no trees, only sand-hills, flats by the river, and a few bushes, the higher sand dunes which show the limits of the desert being visible on both sides.

Hence another ten miles took us into Khotan on July 13th. A small buran was blowing and the air was consequently thick with sand, so the country was almost invisible; but from what could be seen it appeared to be mostly grassy flats with scattered houses at intervals. Here there were stones in the road again, the first seen, with the exception of the Mazar Tagh, since one day out from Kucha.

We were in Khotan at last, having covered four hundred and sixty-four miles from Kucha in twenty-six days (twenty-five marches), a pretty good performance with a worn-out caravan, but accomplished at considerable cost of horseflesh. We started from Kucha with thirty-two ponies, but twelve of these we gave away to various shepherds on the road, as

they were unfit to go on, and even if they could have reached Khotan would never have been able to make Ladak without a long rest. As the donkey loads of grain diminished we transferred our own things from our travel-worn animals to the donkeys, and so got on. The marching powers of these little beasts filled us with admiration, but, of course, it must be remembered that they started fresh, whereas our ponies had done a thousand miles from Kuldja before reaching Kucha.

As far as I can see, the Khotan River has nothing to recommend it. It was our shortest way back, and was also new to us, which was something; but there is a deadly sameness about it which is usual in Central Asian jungles. However, some information is always to be gained, and this part of our journey exploded a long-cherished idea of mine that the Khotan River might afford really good sport with the Yarkand stag and jeron; they certainly both exist there, particularly about the Yangi Daria, but the stags are very heavily shot there in summer for their soft horns, and the does as well in the autumn for their skins. A beg who came with us part of the way told us that there were probably a hundred shikaris out in the woods after the stags, and that they would most of them get one or two, which is a heavy drain on a country. The stags are then comparatively easy to shoot, as they frequent the more open places. He also said

that they were not hard to get during the calling season, but that the mosquitoes then were almost unbearable, which is in direct contradiction with what I heard in Aksakmaral, and which I fancy is probably nearer the truth. As well as mosquitoes, there are scorpions, and the whole country is simply infested with the largest and most active ticks I have ever seen.

The soil is very sandy, and as there is usually a fresh breeze, at any rate during part of the day, the result may be imagined. It is like living in a bunker with a strong wind blowing, and any one of the numerous army of golfers will recognise the fact that such is not a desirable place of residence for longer than can be helped. The wind is said to blow all through the winter as well.

The natives told us that wild camels have occasionally been shot to the west of Yangi Daria, and that for them winter is the best time. But on the whole the country is worthless from a sportsman's point of view.

In Khotan we camped in a pleasant garden outside the town, and spent five whole days there, enjoying the rest and eating immense quantities of fruit and vegetables, the latter being one of the things which one does not miss till one has to go without them. We had a lot of horse-dealing to do, as the remains of our caravan were mostly unfit to go further; but this did not

take long, as there were lots of ponies about, and we were not disposed to haggle much over prices, usually giving one of our ponies and a considerable pecuniary consideration for a fresh and strong beast. We exchanged calls with the amban, an old acquaintance of mine, whom I had formerly met in Yarkand, and who I fancy must have done something and have been sent here for punishment. We put in a good deal of time buying jade, for which Khotan is celebrated, also a lot of curios from Borasan, which Dr. Sven Hedin has so fully described in his book *Through Asia* (vol. ii.) that it would be unnecessary for me to say much about them, even if I knew anything. For the benefit of future travellers I may say that the people usually ask a very much larger price than they are prepared to accept—no new thing in Asia; but here they are worse than most places. One man started by asking 200 tongahs for some things, and finally took 15. Khotan is also celebrated for its carpets, but the aniline dye has arrived there and made them worthless—at least in our eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

KHOTAN TO SHAHDULA AND LEH

Marches.		
1.	Khotan to Kanera . . .	10 miles.
2.	Kanera to Zawa . . .	15 ,,
3.	Zawa to Pialma . . .	28 ,,
4.	Pialma to Zangawa . . .	22 ,,
5.	Zangawa to Poshki . . .	21 ,,
6.	Poshki to Cheribaldi Mazar Kojam .	23 ,,
7.	Cheribaldi to 1 mile short of Tom .	14 ,,
8.	—— to ——	15 ,,
9.	—— to 1½ mile short of Alnazar . .	15 ,,
10½.	—— to 3 miles past Togras-su . .	15 ,,
	Total	178 ,,

On the evening of July 19th we took to the road again. One way is by Borasan, but this was blocked by high water in the streams, so we had to take the other and more northerly route. The proper march being a very long one to begin with, we only did ten miles, and camped in an orchard at the village of Kanera. The country is very fertile and well cultivated, pleasant to look at after the sands and jungle of the Khotan River. About seven miles west of Khotan a tongue of sand,

rather more than a mile in width, has come in from the Takkla Makhan, and this covers the ancient city of Bollamoss, where numbers of seals are at times unearthed. This strip of desert among the cultivation is curious, and my informant said that it must have been sent as a judgment on the inhabitants for their sins.

Next day we went on to Zawa, an easy march of fifteen miles, crossing the Karakash River about a mile and a half after starting; it runs in several channels, and what I suppose may be called in a general way its bed is about a mile wide. The water was low and the fords easy, but in case of need there is a boat, and we were escorted across by a number of boatmen, who of course had to be rewarded for their quite superfluous services. Then came a mile or so of rice-flats, producing as much in the way of weeds as rice, after which we entered the town of Karakash. This is a big and thriving place, with a very long bazaar. The street is narrow, and as it is at this season covered in with awnings to keep out the sun—a custom general in Central Asian towns—the effect was rather like riding through a long and populous tunnel. We camped in an orchard near the serai, which is beyond Zawa proper, and were again treated to a small buran; but as there was no sand to blow about it did not inconvenience us much.

On the 21st, or, to be more strictly accurate, just

WOODEN IDOLS DUG UP NEAR KHOTAN

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before dawn on the 22nd, we arrived at Pialma, after a long march of twenty-eight miles through a most dreary country, beginning with high sand-hills and going on across a level gravelly plain. For most of the way across this the road is marked out with poles, and at one place a lamp is hoisted for the guidance of travellers—most necessary precautions, as the track is not well defined and nothing could be easier than to miss it. In fact, our guide did so immediately the poles came to an end; but in the darkness we heard some donkey-men singing, and they put us right. Among the sand-hills is a mazar where an immense number of pigeons live, supported among the seas of sand by the charity of travellers, a small gift of grain being a recognised obligation. This the birds know well, and as soon as anyone comes in sight they start flying and walking down the road to meet him. Like Dr. Sven Hedin, we were told that any rash hawk which should venture to attack them would immediately fall dead. Half-way across the plain is Ak Langar, a rest-house and praying place, built during the Mahommedan supremacy, and certainly intended to last, as it is mostly made of cut stone, the transport of which must have been an expensive business; the water in the well there is very salt. Pialma is now a decadent village; once it was large and important, but the sand has encroached and reduced it to half its former size.

After twenty-two miles more of gravelly plain comes the large village of Zangawa, where there lives a most attentive beg. He is rather a big man, being the head of several villages, and did us like princes, apparently thinking that nothing could be too good for the sahibs travelling through his district. When we rode up in the middle of the night we found the camping-ground under some trees all ready, swept, and garnished with carpets and numnahs, the trees hung with lanterns, and in the middle two cushion-covered divans, and Chinese tables, while the beg himself was there ready to pay his respects and give us the tea of welcome. From him we learnt that though the Kilyan Pass was still blocked with snow the Sanju was open, but that the route to it by Sanju village being almost impassable, owing to high water, we should have to take the alternative route by Poshki and the Chuchu Dawan (*dawan* is any pass or hill over which there is a road).

Accordingly next day we turned our faces south, and escorted by the beg, rode twenty-one miles to the long and straggling strip of cultivation which forms the village of Poshki. The way was over a gently but steadily rising gravel plain to within five or six miles of our destination; then the foot-hills begin, and our road was mostly up the bed of a stream, a rough path in the dark.

It amounts to something to travel with a really

THE AMBAN OF KHOTAN

THE ROAD NEAR KHOTAN

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big and hospitable beg. At two places on the way fires had been lit and tea prepared to refresh us; while here also, at the selected camping-ground, elaborate preparations had been made for our reception, and most of the inhabitants, attired in their best clothes, had assembled to receive us.

Here at last we got clear of the mosquito country, and put our curtains away for good; but, in justice to these pestilent insects, I must confess that they did not annoy us much after we left Khotan.

From this on the road was too rough for night travel, and the heat was no longer so great as to render it necessary; so we took to the old early morning starts again, and stayed a day at Poshki to make the change.

On the 25th we were off again, and did twenty-three miles of the rather stony valley road to Cheribaldi Mazar, a halting-place, where there is fair grass. The scenery among these foot-hills is not at all attractive, as they rather resemble exaggerated sand-hills, on which there is only a little coarse bent grass, a scrubby little shrub of the boortza variety, and a few stunted willows on the banks of the streams. Further into the hills, where they are higher and rocky, there are both ibex and burhel, but down here there is nothing; it looks perfect ground for shapu (*Ovis vignei*), only there is nothing of the sort there.

Next morning, with many thanks for all his

kindness, we bade adieu to our good friend the beg, who had insisted on accompanying us thus far; and turned westwards up a side valley, at the top of which we crossed the Chuchu Dawan, not a very formidable hill, though the road on both sides of it is pretty rough. The water on either side comes from springs, and is saltish. By the Chuchu Dawan route the Sanju Valley is entered above the worst of the narrows, which in summer are made impassable by high water; but even so the road on is a wet one. We had only made a mile or so up the Sanju Valley when the afternoon flood came down and stopped us; so we had to camp where we were, having done only fourteen miles, the worst of it being that there was no grass. While at Tom, which is only a mile further on, and which is the proper stage, there is plenty; but the stream was now a raging torrent, and the two fords which yet remained to be crossed were obviously impassable. The next march was to Kichik Yailak, over a road which is almost as much in the water as out of it. Here there were a lot of Kirghiz aüls, and their chief man came some way down the road to meet us. They had pitched a tent for us, and brought us offerings of milk and sheep, of course expecting to receive about twice their value as a return gift; indeed about here and in the Yarkand country the receipt of complimentary presents is a very expensive way of buying things.

Having some idea of what was in front of us, we hired yáks from these Kirghiz, both for riding and baggage, and very early on the morning of the 28th started in a misty, drizzly weather to attack the Sanju Pass.

On the map the height of this pass is given as 16,800 feet, which I fancy must understate the case, as I am pretty sure from its effects on ourselves and the caravan animals that it is a good deal higher than the Kilyan. However, be that as it may, there is no doubt that it is much the worse pass of the two, the Kilyan being very steep only on the north side, while the Sanju is so on both. It crosses a razor-backed ridge, the sides of which approach so nearly to the perpendicular, that one wonders who first conceived the notion of making a way over it. The path is of course a zigzag, and wriggles its way up among the broken rock which somehow clings to the hillside. There was practically no snow on it; but that proves nothing as regards its height, the snowfall in these hills being very capricious, while as the ridge lies more or less north and south both sides of it get some sun.

Our passage over it was not destined to be unattended by disaster. All the baggage was on yáks, so the ponies were not loaded; but, none the less, five of our new Khotan purchases managed to fall from the path, and rolled a tremendous way

down, with the result that three of them were killed on the spot, the other two escaping with many cuts and bruises. A large number of ponies come to a similar end here, and occasionally men as well. Yáks never make a mistake and never get flurried, so can be ridden up and down almost anywhere with the most complete confidence. Uphill they are certainly slow, but they come down wonderfully quickly.

On the top we were above the mist, so got a fair view of the surrounding peaks, which are remarkable for their sharpness, the whole country being indeed one of the steepest I have seen. We met some Hindus on their way to Yarkand, who told us that they came from Shikapur, and they looked as though they wished they had stopped there. On the north side of the pass there were quantities of ram-chikor, the young birds already well grown, so they must nest very early.

We had meant, if possible, to reach a camping-ground called Alnazar, where there are some tombs, but failed to do so, and stopped about a mile and a half short of it, where there was a fair grass in a side-valley. A long day's work to do some fifteen miles, and the last part of it incessantly in and out of a deep and rocky-bottomed stream. Bad mountain headache, of course, but enough of this wretched day.

Next day we did another fifteen miles in all,

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striking the Karakash River at Alnazar, from which place eight miles took us to the foot of the Bostan Valley, where we met our outgoing road, and so were at last again in a country familiar to us. The Togras-su ford was deep but practicable, so we crossed it and went on a bit of the way to Ulbek.

Between this and Shahdula (the upper fort, the one now used) the Karakash River has to be forded four times, but luckily the water was not too high for ponies, and there was no delay or camel-hiring trouble, so we reached Suget the following afternoon and Kotaz Jilga on the 31st, the last march being the one done in the other direction on July 31st, 1899, a year ago.

On the way we met a Yarkand trader, who told us of great rejoicings in Kashmir and Leh in consequence of the Transvaal War being over, the enemy, according to his account, having all been killed; so we held our little rejoicings too, prematurely as it has turned out.

My tale is now drawing to an end, the road from Kotaz Jilga to Leh having been already described. We again suffered severely from mountain headache, one or two of our men being almost incapacitated by it. North of the Karakoram, antelope were very plentiful and ridiculously tame, seeming not to know what a man was, and paying very little attention to a rifle-shot. They may have been

attracted by the grass, of which there was more than usual; or possibly the hard winter had driven them in from the head of the Karakash River, where practically they are never disturbed. More damage had been done to Dalgleish's monument by Pathan traders or their servants. The tablet was broken in pieces and the stones scattered about, and all we could do was to pile them together again. On August 3rd we crossed the Karakoram pass and reached the Shyok River, near which we saw a lot more antelope, but here they were all does. As on our outward journey, we went on by the Dipsang route, fearing that the water would be too high for us to follow the river down. The Saser pass was crossed on the 7th, and we reached Panamik the next day. In the previous account of this march I mentioned the Talambuti Valley road which was then being made to avoid the Karawal Dawan. This road was now finished, and a wonderful piece of mountain road-making it is, much appreciated by all who travel it. As compared with the old way it is an immense saving, both in distance and work.

On the south side of the Saser pass we saw a lot of burhel, and I had a try after them, but the time at my disposal was too limited, and I met with no success, the stalk resulting in a longish shot and a miss.

On August 12th we reached Leh. Here we

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remained till the 21st, paid off our men, sold the remains of our caravan, and had a well-earned rest, after which we travelled down to Srinagar, doing the 258 miles in ten days, and arriving on August 30th, 1900, after an absence of fourteen months and twenty days.

CHAPTER XV.

FIELD NOTES ON GAME: GAME OF THE TEKKES

The Asiatic or Altai Wapiti (*Cervus canadensis asiaticus*), stag locally called "boách" or "bogi"; hind, "maral."

This fine deer is, above all, *the* trophy to be obtained in the Tekkes, but, sad to say, its numbers are rapidly decreasing, and, probably before many years are gone, it will be about extinct in this district. Most of the natives now have breech-loading military rifles, and the stag's horns in velvet have a high value for the Chinese market, the equivalent of from 50 to as much as 120 rupees (£8), or even more, being paid for a good pair, which causes them to be much sought after; while the hard horns have also a value, though, of course, much less, and are exported to Russia. Though the Kalmaks are great shikaris, they seldom shoot hinds, which is more than can be said of the Kazaks and Kirghiz, who kill everything they can, regardless of age, sex, or season, with a result which is becoming painfully apparent. What a shooting-ground this must have been once may be judged

from the following story, the approximate accuracy of which I see no reason to doubt. Morse's shikari one day, discussing sport in general, told us that about eighteen or twenty years ago he and one companion, shooting in Jilgalong, killed fifty stags in a month, and he wound up by naïvely remarking that he could not imagine where they had all gone to now.

The calling season varies a little, but may generally be said to begin about the 1st of September, and to last a month or rather more. The stags call best in cold weather. The very beginning of it should, I think, be the best time, as most of the mud holes in which the stags roll are high up—*i.e.* just above pine-forest level—and they should then be more easily seen than later on, as during the progress of the rut they work steadily downwards, again going up further after it is over; they are great travellers, and consequently very difficult to come up with.

In his book of horn measurements Mr. Rowland Ward states that the Altai wapiti, though smaller and shorter on the leg than the American one, has absolutely larger antlers. This statement is, I think, a mistake. Certainly we saw no horns to justify it, and the measurements given in Mr. Ward's book are not nearly so big as those of the American animal. We saw lots of horns in Kuldja, among them some twelve pointers, which,

considering the number of points, were remarkably thin and short.

Ibex (*Capra siberica*), buck called "tekkir," in southern Chinese Turkestan "tekka." There is little to add to what I have already said about them. The best months are probably July and August, as the weather should be fair, and though the ibex are then at greater elevations, still as regards distance from one's camping-ground, they are no higher up than earlier in the year.

Siberian Roe (*Capriolus pygargus*), locally called "ullich" or "illik." The best time is from the middle of October to the end of November, as the high grass is then mostly cut down by frost. They begin to shed their horns at the end of November.

Tiger, pronounced "teager" by the Kalmaks. About Jilgalong they are not uncommon, and there is always an off-chance of seeing one, though to get a shot would be a great piece of luck. Judging by their tracks, they are as big as the Indian ones, and in the winter at any rate must have fine coats to enable them to stand the cold.

Leopard, common, but rarely seen. I saw tracks both on high and low ground, but am unable to say

whether the former were those of the snow-leopard or not.

Bear, locally called "aiyu," in southern Chinese Turkestan "aiyak." By signs there seem to be a fair number about, but I only saw one. As their skins are valuable, they are a good deal shot by the natives, and no doubt would be more so but for their reputation for ferocity. The autumn is not a good time to look for them, as they are then fat and do not show much.

Sheep—ram locally called "gulja." Those in the Tekkes must, I think, be *Ovis karelini*; there are still a few survivors in Agoyas (Akjas), and there are also said to be some in the hills north of the Tekkes River. What the other sheep were which we saw at other places on our journey I do not know. The differences in the elevations and nature of the ground they inhabit are alone very puzzling.

Wild pig, locally called "tongus," are common in parts of the Tekkes country, also in the swamps on the Yarkand side. The Kalmaks much esteem their flesh, but the other natives, being Mahommedans, will not touch them.

The Yarkand stag, Yarkand gazelle, hwang

yang, and saiga, must be mentioned, though they do not properly belong to the list of Tekkes game. The Yarkand stag (*Cervus kashmirianus yarkandensis*), locally called "boach"; hind, "maral."

The two best places I know of for these are Aksak Maral on the Yarkand-Maralbashi road, and Yakka Kudak on the Maralbashi-Aksu one. The calling season is said to begin about the 1st of October, and this would be the best time, provided the mosquitoes do not make life in the jungle unbearable, on which point the evidence I collected is somewhat conflicting. As I have said, I tried a winter there once with very poor results, which I believe has been the experience of other sportsmen; but so far as I know no one has tried it in the calling season, when things might be different.

Yarkand gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*), locally called "jeron," found all over the Maralbashi country, and on the banks of the Khotan River, its habitat being practically the same as that of the Yarkand stag. Though it favours the slightly more open parts of the country, it is by no means easy to get.

Hwang yang (yellow sheep), so called by the Chinese—by Mahommedans "jeron"—is, I believe, a near relation of the Yarkand gazelle; but is reddish in colour, with a white face, while the Yarkand one

is greyish-fawn, and its face is marked. We saw them all the way from a march east of the Sairam Nor to Urumtsi, and went after them at times. They live in the absolutely open country, and their pursuit is but vexation of spirit, unless the sportsman has a liking for fancy shooting at extreme ranges.

Saiga (*Saiga tatarica*). At Urumtsi we saw a pair of horns with a piece of fresh skin attached, and were told that they were found a little to the north; but as the horns have medicinal value among the Chinese, they may have been brought a long way.

Kulon, apparently the same as the Thibetan kiang (*Equus hemionus*), a sort of wild donkey, we saw near Ketang, on the Kuldja-Urumtsi Road. A native there told us that wild horses, not kulon, but presumably *Equus prejvalski*, were to be found further north, in the neighbourhood of Tchugutchak.

The Tekkes and Ili list of small game is a considerable one :—

Greater bustard.

Lesser bustard.

Pheasants, which have a neck ring; the Yarkand-side ones have not.

Partridges.

Chikor, resembling the red-legged partridge.

Quail.

Hares.

Ram-chikor, black game, in the hills only.

Geese.

Duck—chiefly mallard, teal, golden eye, and some gadwall in the spring.

Snipe.

The lesser bustard and geese we did not see, as they had left before we got there. The greater bustard, quail, and most of the duck also migrate during the winter; but a few of the latter and some mergansers stop on about Kuldja, where there are some warm springs.

Probably the simplest way to reach the Tekkes is by Batoum and the trans-Caspian railway to Tashkent, thence drive to Kuldja—a sixteen days' journey at least for a tarantass—the total time from England being from 40 to 45 days. Stores of all sorts can be got in Tashkent. The language is the great difficulty; few Englishmen knowing Russian, and fewer still Turki, which is the more useful of the two.

Whether it is worth while to go so far is a matter of individual opinion; but for anyone who is not afraid of roughing it a bit, or of the hard hill-work, it is a fine country, and in my opinion one or two

good Asiatic wapiti heads—I cannot promise more —repay a lot of trouble, while the ibex-shooting is more than first-class, and there are plenty of Siberian roe. On the whole I think that any sportsman who goes there must indeed be hard to please if he does not have a good time with the Kalmaks of the Tekkes.